



JUST LIKE THE COUNTRY

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Memories of London families who settled
the new cottage estates 1919-1939

JUST LIKE THE COUNTRY

MEMORIES OF LONDON FAMILIES WHO SETTLED
THE NEW COTTAGE ESTATES 1919-1939

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theatre production of a musical play with the same title.



Model of two blocks of cottages to be erected at Roehampton

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St Helier Estate

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The Pleasance, Roehampton, looking north, Sept 1924



Variety of house fronts, Becontree

HOMES FOR THE PEOPLE

'THE BUILDER'. 8 NOVEMBER 1918

If the hundreds of thousands of cottages for the working classes, which it is expected will be built with Governmental assistance, are to become real homes in which men and women are to spend contented lives, and bring up happy children, sound in mind and body, then the task is one worthy of the best and most sympathetic consideration of everyone concerned. To bring about such a beneficial result will demand a keen and high degree of intelligence not only from statesmen, but also from men and women of affairs and practical experience.

By rights, many of the requisite houses should be built before demobilization takes place. It is known that in certain areas, because of the cessation of building operations during the war, and by the deterioration of accommodation which has inevitably taken place, overcrowding in dwellings otherwise suitable has resulted, and that dwellings continue to be occupied which in normal circumstances could no longer be regarded as suitable at all. Pressure, in short, has produced and intensified slums, and it is in these slums that the families of many of our brave soldiers now live, and to which they will have to return, unless a great effort is made to deal immediately with a substantial part of a housing programme. Instead of

looking at this proposition as a pauperising one, as is the tendency in certain quarters, should we not consider the State contribution as a free gift to the success of a scheme intended in some extent to signify our indebtedness to the five million soldiers and three million munition workers who have so bravely done their part in keeping these shores free from the arrogance and ruthlessness of an unscrupulous enemy?

We should see to it that for all time the families of old soldiers and sailors have the first right to the occupation of the model houses which it is the nation's purpose to erect and let at modest and, no doubt, uneconomic rents.

But before any building is done, it is necessary to know first, exactly what sort of houses are required in the different localities; and, secondly, where exactly these houses should be placed. Cottages can not be designed on paper; cottages are the result of practical experience. At one time it was thought anyone could design a house, but now we are beginning to understand that if these dwellings are to become real homes, convenient habitations for successive families for many years to come, then each is worthy of the highest consideration.

FOREWORD

BY ROD HACKNEY

'Just Like The Country' provides a fascinating view of one of the most significant periods of change in the history of mass housing provision in the years following the First World War, and the Government's promise to provide 'homes fit for heroes'.

The suspension of the building programme during the Great War meant that conditions in London's inner city slums could scarcely have been worse. This situation is vividly documented here in descriptions of extreme overcrowding, severe lack of basic amenities and the foul environment, all problems caused and compounded by the poverty which was so widespread in the recession years of the twenties and early thirties.

Although the sense of community is strongly conveyed in these descriptions too, nevertheless simple considerations of health and welfare necessitated the movement of thousands of people out of the inner cities. In spite of fears at the prospect, they left their communities of friends and relations for places that many had never seen, at a time when the sites of most of the new LCC estates were, for all practical purposes, out of reach in the country.

Striking examples of the painful process of creating a new community, in circumstances which sometimes included a lack of infrastructure as well as medical or educational facilities, show just how strong was the 'feeling of the times' on the LCC estates in overcoming the initial problems, not only as a result of sharing backgrounds and burdens, and particularly that of poverty, but also due to a desire to share opportunity and progress.

The scale and urgency of the demand for development between the two World Wars have a number of parallels with the extensive re-development undertaken during the latter half of the 1980s and continuing into the 1990s. There is a lesson for today's developers and architects, in terms of the requirement for accurate and sympathetic assessment of the needs of tenants, in those instances described here where the fears of those uprooted from close-knit communities in the inner cities were matched by poor planning or design on the LCC estates. Moreover today, with

the advantage of a further sixty years' experience, there is much more scope for environmentally appropriate and imaginative response on the part of the designer.

For all the startling medical, technical and sociological advances since the 1930s which can now meet the majority of the needs which were most pressing at the beginning of the century, there are too many people still living in poor conditions for this to be read simply as an engaging history. Equally, at a time when a combination of factors – immeasurably improved transport, the decline in the traditional industries and subsequently shifting labour markets – has eroded first the self-sufficiency and then the stability of so many long-established centres of population, we are perhaps in greater danger than ever of neglecting the value of the community.

'Just Like The Country' is an absorbing glimpse of the past as well as an apt reminder of the potential strength and vitality of the community, and the tributes paid by many of the LCC tenants of the twenties and thirties to their Cottage Estates are a timely testimony to the best that state-provided rented housing can be.



An excellent example of adaptation of natural surroundings. Becontree, 1926

INTRODUCTION

BY ANTONIA RUBINSTEIN

'Just Like The Country' presents the reminiscences of Londoners who moved from the inner-city slum dwellings to the spacious 'cottage estates', built by the London County Council between 1919 and 1939.

Of the thirteen London estates built during this period, we at Age Exchange have collected memories relating to eight of them: Becontree, Bellingham, Castelnaud, Downham, Mottingham, Roehampton, St Helier and Watling.

During the last three years, we have interviewed many pensioners from all over London who were rehoused on these 'cottage estates' in the inter-war years. We were also able to find people who were either involved in the building of the estates or worked for the LCC, and their recollections provide a unique record of the working conditions and methods of the period.

Before 1914, living conditions for many in central London were atrocious. A chronic shortage of housing meant that thousands of people lived in overcrowded and unhealthy accommodation. It took the First World War to reveal that Britain was a 'C3' nation with many of the men who volunteered for the forces being turned away due to ill health. The problem of inadequate housing and its relationship with poor health could no longer be ignored and, after the war, it became obvious to those in power that measures had to be taken. A better start in life was also required for the younger generation.

Housing became a major political issue, with Lloyd George advocating, in his election campaign, that Great Britain should be a 'land fit for heroes to live in'. The Housing Act of 1919 was the direct result of these election promises. This made all local authorities responsible for the supply of houses for the less well-off in need of accommodation. The LCC was quick to respond to the new legislation and undertook the construction of a number of 'cottage estates' on the outskirts of London. The houses were built to improved standards in design and comfort. Not only were they light and spacious, they also included an indoor lavatory and bathroom. Each house was set in its own garden, so that children could exercise outside in an enclosed

safe space, while also benefitting from the cleaner atmosphere.

LONDON COUNTY COUNCIL

HOUSING ESTATES, Etc.

Particulars are given below of each of the Council's Housing Estates, arranged alphabetically under the headings (1) Cottage Estates, (2) Block Dwellings, etc., and (3) Lodging Houses. The index numbers correspond with those shown enclosed in circles on the face of the map.

COTTAGE ESTATES

- 1 BECONTREE, Essex.—2,770 acres. 25,769 houses and flats completed. 1 to 6 rooms. 56 houses to be erected.
- 2 BELLINGHAM, Lewisham.—252 acres. 2,676 houses and flats. 1 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 3 CASTELNAU, Barnes.—31 acres. 644 houses. 3 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 4 CHINGFORD, Essex.—187 acres. 168 houses and flats completed. 1 to 5 rooms. 249 houses and flats in course of erection. A further 1,151 houses and flats proposed to be erected.
- 5 DOWNHAM, Lewisham and Bromley.—600 acres. 7,097 houses and flats completed. 1 to 5 rooms. A further 14 houses and flats proposed to be erected.
- 6 GRANGE HILL SITE, Essex.—434 acres. Proposals under consideration.
- 7 HANWELL, Ealing.—140 acres. 1,586 houses and flats. 1 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 8 HEADSTONE LANE, Harrow.—142 acres. Development under consideration.
- 9 KENMORE PARK, Middlesex.—58 acres. 652 houses and flats. 1 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 10 KIDBROOKE, Greenwich.—68 acres. About 834 houses and flats proposed to be erected.
- 11 MOTTINGHAM, Bromley, Lewisham, Chislehurst and Sidcup.—202 acres. 2,337 houses and flats. 1 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 12 NORBURY, Croydon.—28 acres. 717 houses. 3 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 13 OLD OAK, Hammersmith and Acton.—46 acres. 1,056 houses and flats. 1 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 14 ROEHAMPTON, Wandsworth.—147 acres. 1,212 houses and flats. 2 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 15 ST. HELIER, Surrey.—825 acres. 9,075 houses and flats. 1 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 16 THORNHILL, Greenwich.—20½ acres. 380 houses and flats. 1 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 17 TOTTERDOWN FIELDS, Wandsworth.—39 acres. 1,262 houses and flats. 2 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 18 WATLING, Middlesex.—386 acres. 4,034 houses and flats. 2 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 19 WHITE HART LANE, Tottenham and Wood Green.—138 acres. 2,230 houses and flats. 2 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 20 WORMHOLT, Hammersmith.—68 acres. 895 houses and flats. 2 to 5 rooms. Completed.

BLOCK DWELLINGS, Etc.

- 26 ADA PLACE, Bethnal Green.—77 dwellings. 2 to 5 rooms. Completed.
- 27 ALBANY ROAD, Camberwell.—28 dwellings in course of erection. 2 to 4 rooms. A further 132 dwellings proposed to be erected.
- 28 ALBERTA HOUSE, Poplar.—39 dwellings. 2 to 4 rooms. Completed.

Making a move to a 'cottage estate' was, for many people, a momentous decision to take. The communities of inner London were formidably close-knit, and to leave them behind for a new life in the 'country' involved a degree of personal sacrifice. Times were insecure for much of the 1920s and the fear of unemployment meant that certain risks were inevitable. Renting a house on an estate yet to establish itself, often a long way from the work place, introduced new demands and responsibilities, which were to have serious implications for community growth and development.

Yet, 'Just Like The Country' demonstrates how bravely people confronted these challenges. Those who were parents gradually adapted to the new way of life, and after a period of time, the 'community feeling' began to establish itself. The accounts of people who were children at the time convey the great sense of excitement generated by attending new schools, meeting new friends, and exploring the environment around their home.

'Just Like The Country' is not intended to be an academic study of each estate. The book is a collection of reminiscences linked by a common theme. My role as editor and researcher was to encourage the contributors to record their experiences and generate discussion. I approached the research, not just through the text book, but by going into the communities and talking to the people who had helped to establish them.

We visited each estate and got in touch with local community centres, reminiscence groups, social and luncheon clubs. We met with people in their own homes, and it was very exciting to find some of the contributors still living in the houses originally allocated to them. The people we talked to always made us feel most welcome, and they were very generous in sharing their experiences.

All the stories used in 'Just Like The Country' have been taken from taped interviews. Our contributors were asked to explain why and how they applied to the LCC, and then to trace their progress, from the move itself, through the settling in period to the eventual creation of their new communities. They were asked to recall specific incidents, for example what they felt when they first saw their new house,

or what it was like to have a garden or a proper bathroom for the first time in their lives.

I decided not to cover each estate individually because the experience of moving and those first impressions were, for most people, regardless of the estate, remarkably similar. Where the accounts differ is in how each family settled into the community and adapted to the new way of living. It was fascinating to see how quickly each estate evolved its own character, the location and size playing a large part in determining the way the community eventually developed.

All our contributors emphasised in their interviews how much the quality of their families' lives improved, and that being part of an estate community provided all kinds of new opportunities. I have therefore concluded 'Just Like The Country' with a very brief overview, summing up the enormous impact which these estates had upon the lives of those who moved to them.

I would like to thank all those people who helped to make 'Just Like The Country' possible: Pam Schweitzer for giving me the opportunity to carry out this fascinating study which I hope will inspire and interest the reader as much as it did me, Barnaby Brown for his accurate transcribing, and Andy Andrews for putting the final touches to the manuscript. Finally I would like to express my gratitude to the contributors themselves because, without their support, enthusiasm, and willingness to share their experiences, the project would not have been possible and their valuable memories would have gone unrecorded.



Alternate use of brick and white and coloured concrete, Becontree

HOMES FIT FOR HEROES



Foggy rooftops, Brady Street area, 1922

LIVING CONDITIONS BEFORE THE MOVE

My father died when I was three, so my mother moved us from above the coal shop in Walworth Road, South East London, to two rooms in Vauxhall Mansions, Lambeth.

Don't ask what life was like then in those two rooms. Mother used to take in washing. I can see her now, an orange box with a bath on top, rubbing the clothes clean and her legs bad with fibrositis from all the standing. There was a big mangle and Mother would give those that could a penny a time to turn the mangle and the clothes would then be dried around the fire.

On Saturdays, we had to lay in bed while Mother washed all our underclothes. I remember she'd hang the clothes round the fire, so we had all this steam in our room when we was asleep. On Sunday the underclothes would be all clean again. And that's how we went on.

We wasn't alright for food then. Mother always went without but we didn't. I remember the time we'd only have a cup of cocoa and a pound of broken biscuits for dinner. In those days you could go round to the soup shop, where you'd get a penny bowl of pea soup, but you had to take your own bread. On Friday when Mother got paid, we'd have pie and mash and that was a luxury.

Mother cooked on this big range, which was in the same room as half of us slept in, and I can remember the coal man come to shoot the coal in the coal box which was under the window. Because Mother couldn't afford anything else, I slept in an iron cot and that was my bed until I was fifteen.

Betty Mapstone (Becontree)



Hatfield Street, Southwark, showing backstreet shops, rag and general merchant, and fruiterer, 1923



Tabard Street, Southwark, with Pink's Factory behind, 1918

BUGS IN THE BED

We lived in three upstairs rooms in Battersea, my parents and nine children. We had no garden so we used to run about in the streets. Mum and Dad had the front room and us lot shared the other ones. There were five to my bed, three up and two down. Our old house was buggy. They looked like black ladybirds, in every room they were flying everywhere. They didn't bite but crawled all over the place and we'd have to knock them out of the beds. They'd breed very quick. It was terrible!

Harvey Edmonds (Becontree)

Before my father died we lived in a bug-ridden house in Walworth. It was a private tenancy and we had two rooms, which we ate, slept and did everything in. Within two months of my father dying, the London County Council moved us out to some flats in Westminster.

We still only had two bedrooms there, so my sister and I slept with my mother and the boys all slept in the other room. I remember that first night in the flat, a cousin of mine said, "Aunty, do you know there are bugs in this room?". When my mother heard that she just wept.

I wonder how she managed then because she only had the widow's pension of ten shillings a week. That was her sole income and you didn't get money from the Poor Law, you just got food. My eldest brother and sister worked in London but they only earned seven-and-six. Mother always used to say, "Never mind, one day we will have a home. We will have a nice home."

She was a fighter and after the flat had been fumigated she was determined to get us out. Some old neighbours had moved to Middleton Road on the St Helier Estate so my mother went to see them. When she saw their place she said, "That's for us."

Vi (St Helier)



Tabard Garden area before clearance, 1913



Mander Place, Union Street, Southwark, 1923

A COMPLAINING LANDLADY

We had a couple of rooms in Catford and our landlady wasn't very co-operative. She didn't like children and would complain about our child making a noise. I mean what noise does a child make when it's running around in bare feet? And I wasn't one to stand for that.

Hetty Gates (St Helier)



Stepney, 1923

SOMEHOW WE MANAGED

We used to live in the top end of Tanners Hill, Deptford. The houses were very tiny and close together and it was just like a little village. We had two rooms in my uncle's and aunt's house. They had two daughters and at one time we had great aunt Harriet there as well. I don't know where we all slept but we managed. We had no running water at all in the house and every time you wanted to fill the kettle you had to go outside to the wash house, in the garden.

Of course we all lived close together but we knew everybody and everybody knew us. My father's mother, and his twelve brothers and sisters, lived in and around Deptford. My father used to take us round to see Grandma every Sunday morning. Some of the other relations would come too. She had a tiny sitting room and those that couldn't fit in would be sitting up the stairs. The children would be sent outside to play. We were one big happy family then and I loved Deptford.

Unfortunately I became sick and the doctor said I was to get out of Deptford so my parents got half a house in Fosdene Road, Charlton. We had two bedrooms, a living room and a small kitchen with a gas cooker and a range. There was no bathroom and we shared the toilet, which was downstairs, with the people who lived below us.

Dorothy Barton (St Heller)



Upper Ground Place, Southwark, 1923



22 Red Lion Street showing the range, 1929

ILL HEALTH

There were eight of us living in three rooms in Paddington, and we were overcrowded. We had to find new accommodation because of my father's health, he had TB (Tuberculosis).

Tina Belton (Roehampton)

We lived in the Peabody Buildings over Hammer-smith Bridge and there were about sixty steps up to our flat. My brother had heart problems and couldn't do the stairs. The doctor gave my mother a letter to take to the council and that's how it went from there.

Mrs Tanner (Castelnau)

Mother had bronchitis and had been advised to move from North London to Downham because of the air, which at that time was considered to be good. My father didn't have a job at the time and it was years before he found work, so it was because of my mother that we got the house.

Vera Andrews (Downham)

THE TIN BATH

When Father came out of the Navy, after the First World War, he went straight to work in the Docks. Because he had regular work, we never knew poverty like some did, some had to run about with no shoes.

There were five of us living in this flat, overlooking the Thames. We had two rooms and a kind of kitchenette-cum-scuttery affair with a sink. From our bedroom you could see all the tugs and boats going by. Between us and the river, we was facing the local tipping for the waste rubbish to go onto the Thames. The dust carts used to come along and they were all emptied into a shoot which went into a barge. Looking back on it, it couldn't have been very healthy, living where we did, what with all that dust and God knows what in the air.

We had no bathroom and every Friday night we had a bath in the tin bath. We would have to heat the water up by kettle. If you were the first one in, it was lovely but if you were the last! When we got too big to sit in the tin bath we were sent to the public baths.

These baths served about eight or nine blocks of flats and were in the middle of our buildings. Mother used to give us a towel and some soap and we'd go and take our turn in the bath queue. When we got inside we were given a bath cubicle with a number. I remember if our water was too hot we'd shout out, "Cold in number four," and they'd turn on the cold water for you.

Florence Essam (Becontree)

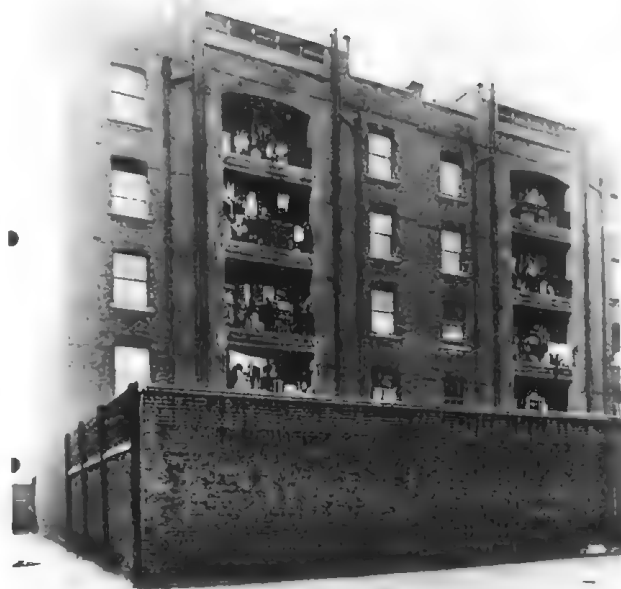


Brady Street Area, 1923

NO LOO!

I'd come from buildings in Whitechapel and we never had a lavatory. On each landing there would be four flats and a wash house. In the wash house was the lavatory, a ladies and a gents. Unfortunately they were filthy and rotten and absolutely vandalised. My father would never go there. We had buckets in our flat for the widdle, anything other than that, my father would do it on paper, because he just couldn't in the lavatory.

George Herbert (Becontree)



Old Castle Street, Aldgate. Slum tenements backing on to a school, 1919

ABSOLUTELY DISGUSTED

We lived in Paddington and by today's standards it was a pretty awful place though as a child I thought it had a great charm to it. The toilet was out in the backyard and we didn't have any water in our flat. You had to bring the water upstairs from the outhouse in jugs. If you wanted to wash, you would heat the water up on the stove. Then you put an oilcloth on a big table. You had your bowl on the table and you washed from there. When you had a bath, the tin bath would be brought out and you would bath in front of the fire like you see in the old films, with the miners. That's how it was in London.

My father was absolutely disgusted. He had gone through the war, been badly injured, and there were supposed to be homes fit for heroes but there weren't any. He put his name down on the housing list in 1919 and it took eight years for something to crop up.

Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)

BUILDING THE COTTAGE ESTATES

'THE WATLING RESIDENT'. MAY 1928

Owing to the high cost of postwar building, the erection of small houses to be let at weekly rentals ceased to be a remunerative proposition, with the result that this class of house lost its attraction to the speculative builder. Members of the working class were unable to pay remunerative rents and the burden of providing housing for them fell upon the shoulders of the local authorities and even they were unable to bear this burden without financial assistance from the government and a contribution from the rates.

In dealing with the complex problem of providing housing accommodation for the working classes, one of the initial difficulties is the selection of adequate and suitable sites at a reasonable price.

There are many points to be borne in mind when considering the suitability of a site required for a housing estate, such as accessibility, its capability for economic development, facilities for drainage, lighting, water supplies, travelling facilities, cheap fares, proximity to factories etc. These are important matters which must be carefully and seriously considered before any definite decision can be made regarding the acquisition of a site.

A compact estate of nearly 390 acres has been secured named 'Watling Estate' after the famous thoroughfare of that name constructed by the Romans. The land is undulating in character and well wooded. The Silk Stream runs through part of the estate. These natural conditions afford the opportunity of carrying out an attractive development of the property and limits the

number of houses to be erected to a rate of twelve per acre.

A total of forty-one acres has been allocated for open spaces. Sites have also been provided for Churches. The Local Education Authority is acquiring five sites for the erection of elementary schools, and building operations on some of these have commenced. A large site on the north eastern corner is being reserved for a secondary or selective school. Shopping centres are being developed in Edgware Road and in Watling Avenue west of Burnt Oak Station on lands leased by the council.

The majority of the houses will be brick or concrete construction but the scheme includes 464 timber framed houses and about 250 'Atholl' steel houses. When the development of the estate is completed about 3980 houses and flats will have been provided.

The accommodation varies in size from flats of two rooms to houses of five habitable rooms, each of which will be lit by electricity supplied from the Hendon Electric Supply Company Ltd, who have provided the mains and the wiring and the fittings in the houses. Gas is supplied for cooking purposes. The Gas Light and Coke Company Ltd will supply the gas and provide the mains in the road and the pipes and fittings in the houses. The streets are lit by gas.

The rents for the houses vary between 10/- to 17/3d a week.



Wide roads are an important feature of the Becontree Estate

BUILDING THE ESTATES

'The Builder' 1919. Mr H Lanchester RIBA

Our plans for the labourer's house often show that we have not really understood the labourer's family, nor how they carry on their home life. It is not enough to imagine ourselves living in the cottage; we must know how the labourer wants to live and how he does live. We must also try to blend with that, how he ought to

live. We want to give him a hint from time to time, so that he might improve his methods.

At the same time it is up to us to give him every facility to live a happy, comfortable life and put whatever we know of beauty into the cottage, so that the next generation shall grow up under better conditions.



Becontree 1925. General view from 148 Langhorne Road showing foundation walls set out

LCC SITES FOR NEW COTTAGE ESTATES

Mottingham Site 328 Acres. Report by Architect. G. Topham Forest.

This site at Mottingham rises at easy gradients towards the south and is situated generally at a height of 200 feet above sea level.

It appears about 240 acres will be available for working class houses. About 4,000 houses could be built, giving a density of about twelve to the acre over the whole site.

This site is a good one for housing purposes. On the site is a woodland known as Lower Marvel's Woods of about twelve acres, which together with smaller groups of trees, should be preserved and incorporated into the development. The land now occupied by playing fields is flat, and on the remainder the undulations are such as would allow an attractive development without excessive stepping of the blocks of houses.

DEVELOPING BECONTREE

My father worked for the London County Council and he helped to organise the purchase of the land from the farmers for the Becontree Estate. The farmers were very happy with the money they got and most of them were happy about selling. I remember them saying to my father that they were grateful for what he had done and that he had done his duty. They were generous and I can remember hampers of food arriving at Christmas, after they had sold up.

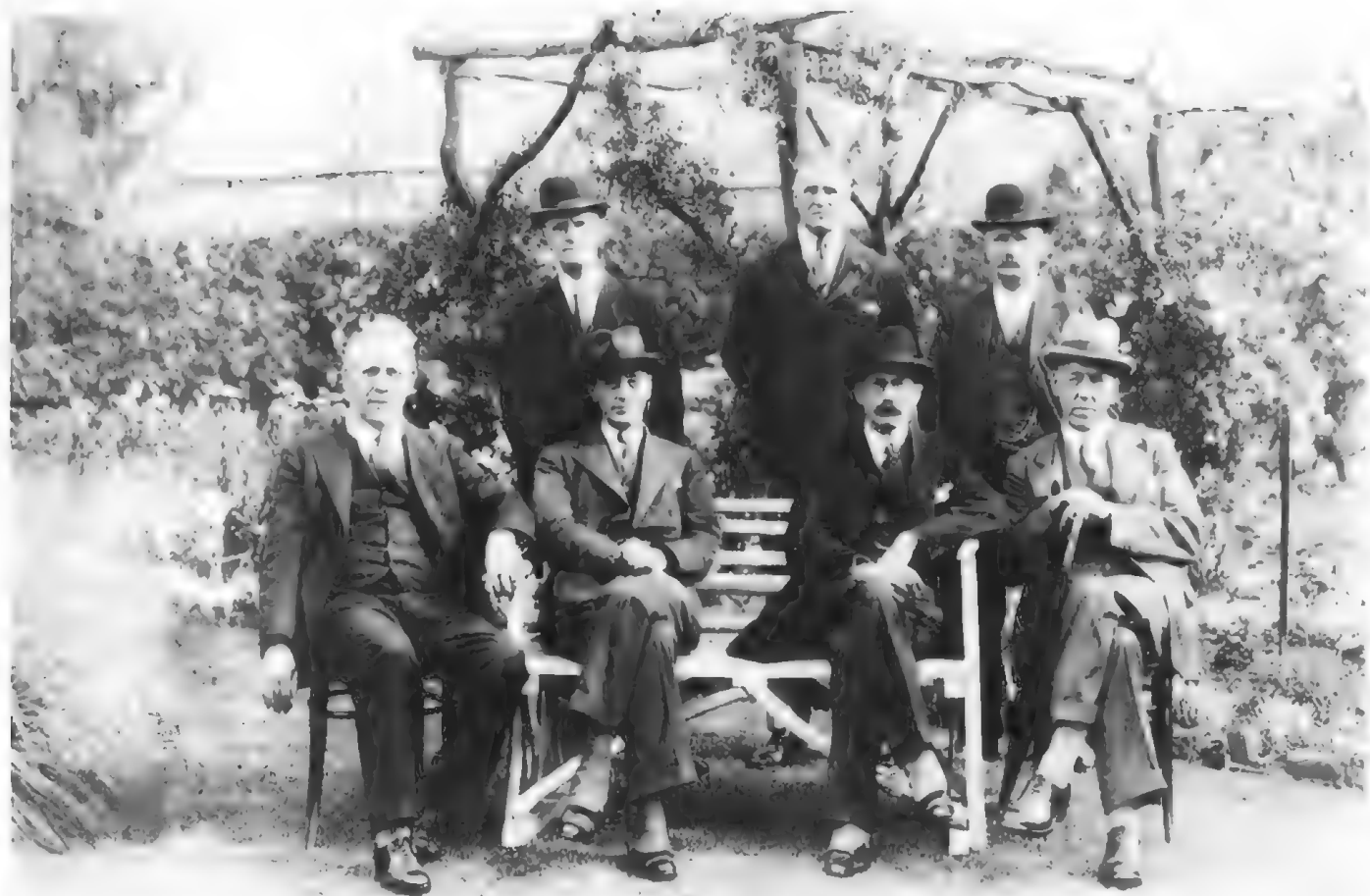
We lived in a very nice farmhouse in Gale Street. The land about us was flat and uninteresting but it was genuine Essex countryside. When we first moved there I had to bicycle four miles to Chadwell Heath Station to get to school. I would pass about four houses and all the fields were growing peas and rhubarb and I used to see the women bundling the rhubarb.

We knew that the construction firms were coming and that we would eventually have to move. They wanted the land that belonged to our house to build a railway station and as the new houses grew up we moved to another Victorian farm house called Burleighs in Chadwell Heath.

My father wasn't highly paid but he had a free house and a car with a chauffeur. I can remember that he often had to entertain visitors from overseas that came to see what was considered at that time, a remarkable project. It was a big estate and my father was quite proud of it and the foreigners thought it was marvellous.

My father then became the Resident Agent for the Becontree Estate. He had to organise the maintenance work and the rent collection. I remember it was very well run and maintained. He was quite happy in his job which was an interesting sociable job and he was supportive in the idea and success of the estate.

Edwin Hardy Amies



Visit by Minister of Health to Becontree, 1st August 1929
 Top row from left: L.H. Oliver, Clerk of Housing Committee; Capt. H.W. Amies, Local Resident Representative Valuers Dept. (Edwin Hardy Amies' father); Mr Stevenson, Resident engineer for admin of housing development schemes (Chief Engineer). Front row from left: Mr H.R. Selley, Vice-Chairman of Housing Committee; Mr Arthur Greenwood, Minister of Health; Lord Monk Bretton, Chairman of the Council; Mr E.M. Spence, Chairman of Housing Committee.



King George V and Queen Mary visiting new houses on visit to Becontree, 1923

BUILDING DOWNHAM

I went to work on the Downham Estate in 1925 for the contractor that did the cartage. Our job was to shift ballast, sand and cement, and to pick up the sandbags. We also used to get the job of carting the muck away when the builders cut the footings out.



King George V talking to a bricklayer at Becontree, 1923



*Pressing concrete blocks by hand, Becontree.
Notice blocks curing in the background*

Where Sandstone Road, Grove Park SE12 is now, there were stables and a farm. You had to be at the stable at half past six to get your horse ready and go to the estate. We'd start there round about eight o'clock and finish at five.

The wages were about £2 18s 5d a week, for which you worked damned hard, and when you got home at night you had to clean the horse and put him to bed. And on Sunday mornings you had to go in and look after him.

During the day you would get all sorts of instructions of what to do, twenty-five loads or whatever. You worked on your own all the time, loaded and unloaded your **own vehicle** and carted it wherever it had to go, **sometimes over to the railways**, where they used to have train loads of bricks from Hither Green sidings and sometimes to Sandpit Road, where most of the sand and ballast came from.

You used to have all sorts of contractors coming on the estate like the cement people. There was a big cement shed and if you wanted anything you went there and got it. Sometimes you picked up a couple of bags of cement and a bit of sand and took it to a chap working on his own somewhere on the estate.

You only had one horse, unless you had a job where you wanted two or three horses when you'd chain them together. One time we had a big conveyor to move and we had the three horses, one in front of another. Coming up Downham Way was a bit of a job.

We had about twenty to twenty-five drivers and if we wanted extras sometimes we contracted from MacDonalds in Bromley. There were never any strikes on the estate, we didn't know what a strike was and my governor was a pretty decent bloke. I left in 1927 to go to another job working for the local council.

Toby (Downham)

My memories of Downham in 1925-6 are of lorries running all over the estate. They were tiny one ton Fords with solid tyres and they used to buzz about through the potholes and ruts. When the lorries came onto the main road they left large dirty muddy tracks. There were also these larger lorries, and their transmission to the rear wheels was a large chain and they used to be very noisy. On the flat part of the estate was a full gauge railway track, and as far as I know there were three steam engines which pulled trucks loaded with bricks.

I can remember the names of two engines, there was 'Puffin' Billy' and the other was called 'London'. They used to run along the bottom part of Downham Way through Rangefield Road and so on but they couldn't go up Southover, it was far too steep there.

John Edwin Smith (Downham)



General view of Downham looking south



LCC's visit to Becontree in 1926 with C.J. Wills train

THE CONTRACTOR'S RAILWAY

C J Wills & Son Ltd, the contractors for the St Helier Estate, faced with the mammoth task of providing material to build a completely new town, decided to construct a supply railway. This they had done before on similar projects at Edgware (Watling) and Becontree.

The railway track of comparatively light weight, was well aligned and ballasted with clinker. It was enclosed with tall chestnut fencing in all public places, and road crossings had proper white barred gates.

They were worked mainly by the train's crew.

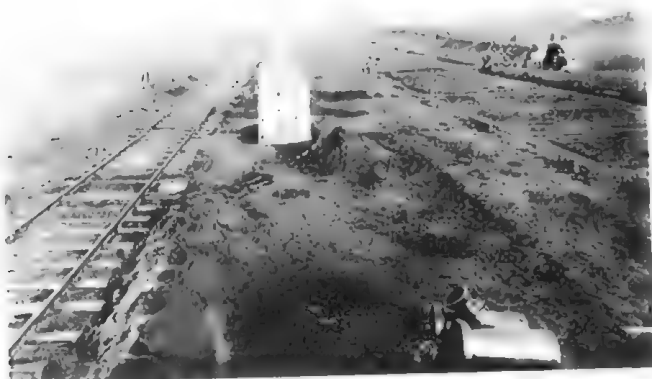
Six locomotives worked the line at different times. All were six-coupled, inside cylindered, saddle tank engines and named in order of age: 'Partington', 'Mermaid', 'Woodcroft', 'Edgware', 'Hendon' and 'Lionheart'.

Bulletin of the Wandle Group. June 1981. By J. Williams.

THE TRENCH DIGGER

We lived on the Becontree Estate in Dagenham and as my dad was out of work I had to get a job. My brother-in-law was a gate-keeper on the railway line that carried the building materials onto the estate. It was through his contacts that I was able to get a job as a navvy for C.J. Wills, the local builders. I was employed by them to help dig the trenches for the sewers on the Becontree Estate.

It was still all fields where we were working, though there were railway lines for the building works and the roads had been marked out. There were about thirty people in our team laying sewers, pipes, and digging the trenches, which in those days was all pick and shovel. I got paid one shilling and threepence an hour but I remember the people handling the walling were called the timbermen and they got one penny an hour more. Their job was to put in these big thick timbers and struts which held up the walls of the trench. We could then continue to work without the trench collapsing.



Becontree. Railway track to distribute materials to building plots.

I remember my very first day. I was told by my boss, who was called the ganger, to take a pickaxe out of the tool box. Well of course all the good picks had already been taken by the other workers. The only pick left was a big Anchor and I could hardly lift it, let alone use it. "Never mind," I thought, "I've got to earn some money."

My boss told me to go behind this chap, who was working where there was a line all marked out and I was to start digging down to a particular depth. When it got to four o'clock in the afternoon I could hardly lift myself, and we were supposed to pack up at five! The chap I was working with then said, "Billy pack up, you've done enough for today, I'll clean up the side of the trench for you." When I got home I could have eaten two dinners I was so hungry. I was only eighteen at the time but

gradually my muscles got used to the work and I got stronger.

The building site was divided up into sections, each with its own supervisor and ours was called Mr Smithie. He had a vast section. Apart from our team, he had brickies, tilers, plasterers and all other types of trades working under him. He was the boss and you did whatever he told you to do.

After the pipes and sewers had been put in, the builders started working on the houses. They were very quick and you could watch a house going up in front of you. Where there was a plot of land in a field it would be marked out with pegs and string by men in suits. From then on the building of the house was supervised by the Clerk of Works. He would continually come round to see how all the different trades were progressing and check that each trade had done their work correctly. The building would start with the navvies digging out the ground for the foundations.

The foundations or footings as they were called were made to a special formula of sand, cement and shingle. As they were short on labour, I was loaned out to help with this job, which involved mixing and laying the concrete footings. The Clerk of Works would be there to check we had done it properly, always inspecting things were O.K. before the brickies were allowed in.

After the brickies had finished their work, the roof was built. In came the tiler labourers. They had a very precarious job as they used to go up and down those ladders with a load of tiles balanced on their heads. With the outside of the house complete, it was the turn of the carpenters and lastly the gas installers and plasterers.

As it was a vast estate there were hundreds of men working on it. When it was eventually finished, it became the biggest estate in the world. I got used to my job and I particularly liked laying the footings, but after about nine months as a navvy I was unfortunately made redundant. In 1930 there were so many people out of work that all men under the age of twenty-one working for C J Wills were sacked to make way for older men.

I didn't want to leave but I was quickly able to find a job digging for the railway because they were in the process of electrifying the line from Barking to Upminster.

Bill Hahn (Becontree)



Roofers at work on Downham. Dennis-Wild houses, 1925

THE HOD CARRIER

A friend of mine who was a ganger told me that his father, a builder's foreman, was looking for a hod carrier to work on the building site of Roehampton Estate.

In those days the only way to find a job like that was by hanging round the boozers or by knowing the right people. I was just eighteen then and looking for work, so I said, "Right," and I got taken on as a hod. I wasn't much interested in the estate and nor was my mother. As long as I had a job, that was all that bothered her. I got paid an hourly rate of one shilling and a farthing. Even though it wasn't that much, it went quite a long way then, and you had to do a nice lot of work for that money.

When I started there were still quite a lot of big fields round the estate. The houses were spread about as only some parts of Dover House had been built.

I was the hod for a team of four bricklayers and two labourers and as I was one of the youngest I was doing really hard work. All the hods were called 'Monkeys' then, so that became my nickname - Monkey!

There was a 'chaser', the governor's right hand man, on site and he was called the 'bellhorse'. The

bellhorse was a bloke that got paid a penny extra an hour. He set the pace and did all the leading for the labourers. Whatever the bellhorse did, we had to follow him exactly. Whatever he dropped down, we dropped down too, you couldn't skive nothing and we were chasing our bellhorse up and down that ladder all day long. It was hard work but we had quite a few laughs.

Two brickie teams were needed to build one house and it would take about a fortnight. I remember the bricks being delivered to us by lorry from the London Brick Company. All the estate roads were built before the houses but there was plenty of mud around and ours was a right muddy old job.

All the houses we worked on were built to the same pattern and the brickwork cost about one hundred and twenty pounds. All our houses were really well built and everything had to be just right. There was no skiving and when we had finished a house, we'd just move onto the next site.

Apart from the brickies there were other different teams working on each house. One team did the groundwork. Then someone came and laid the concrete and the footings and then the bricklayers would start, with the scaffolders working round them. Scaffolding in those days was all done with wooden poles, which were just the right length.

*L.C.C. DOWNHAM HOUSING ESTATE.
SPECIAL METHODS OF CONSTRUCTION.*



Different types of pre-fabricated houses on Downham

The poles were tied together with rope, and they'd be 'as safe as houses'! Scaffolders knew their job. It only used to take them two days, working round the brickies, to rig out one house. Lastly came the roof. Two different contractors were used for that. One for the roofing and one for the tiling.

All the contractors had to carry out the job just right and our foreman was a hard master. He had to be. In them times they had to be hard! Then there were the blokes who would regularly come down to see everything was done right and proper before we could carry on with something else.

Len Dunning (Rochampton)



*'Tibbenham' house interior, Bellingham 1926.
Note reproduction Tudor beams*



*A typical cul de sac (banjo type) on the Watling Estate.
Timber framed non-parlour and Atholl steel
four roomed parlour houses, 1928*

THE MOVE

APPLICATIONS FOR TENANCIES

LCC BECONTREE TENANTS HANDBOOK 1933

Applications for accommodation on the estate should be addressed to the Valuer (Housing) Old County Hall, Spring Gardens SW1.

Applications are generally accepted in the order in which they are received, preference being given to residents in the County of London. At the present time, applications can also be considered from persons living outside the County of London. Persons who are neither living nor working in London can be considered for certain types of houses on north sections of the estate.

Married sons of tenants can be registered for accommodation and married daughters may be registered provided their husbands work in the County of London.

Rents and Accommodation.

The approximate weekly rents (including rates and water charges) are as follows:

Two Roomed Flats	9/6d a week
Three Roomed Flats	11/6d a week
Three Roomed Cottages	12/6d a week
Four Roomed Non Parlour Type	14/-d a week
Four Roomed Cottage Parlour Type	15/6d a week
Five Roomed Cottage Parlour Type	17/6d a week
Six Roomed Cottage Parlour Type	22/6d a week

The cottages contain, 3, 4, 5 and 6 rooms (apart from scullery, WC, coal cupboard and bathroom). There are also 2 and 3 roomed flats with kitchens.

Every cottage and flat has a garden, front and back, and is provided with gas, while many have in addition, electricity for lighting.

THE ESTATE CLERK

When I joined the London County Council, slum clearance was being carried out. If council flats were going to be pulled down, people were told of the options that were open to them, Becontree, White City etc. Some people wished to stay right in the East End and if there were new flats going, they would stop there. It was common knowledge that if you wanted to go onto the housing list, there were possibilities of accommodation in whatever area you wanted on the Becontree Estate.

There was an application form to get onto the housing waiting list and it recorded income and any disabilities. The application form would then go through to the central office. I can see it now, 'Valuation, Estates and Housing', and Mr Westwood was the valuer. All people were then interviewed at their home before there was any question of moving. This was done to check domestic standards and to see what the family's financial resources were. It also checked on the size of the family because accommodation was allocated according to how many members there were. For example a couple would be given a one bedroomed flat. A couple with two children of the same sex would have a two bedroomed cottage and so on. If a member of the family suffered from TB, they would

then be allocated a separate bedroom. The person carrying out the interview usually had a fairly detailed knowledge of where the family were likely to be accommodated and he could then pass it onto them verbally.

Eric Phillips (Becontree)

A LONG WAIT

My father was a tram conductor and he got all the gen about the estate from the tram depot. In those days you weren't allowed a house unless you could show that you had a regular pay packet, and people like firemen, postmen, bus and tram men got priority, because they had that.

My father asked for accommodation and the council said, "Yes, we will put you on the list, but it may be a long wait." And they came to see where we were living.

Lillian Badger (Castelnau)

As soon as Dad came out of the army from the First World War he put his name down on the waiting list for the Old Oak Estate up at Shepherds Bush. The council wanted to send him to the Becontree Estate down Dagenham but Dad said he wasn't going out that far. You see we were living in Paddington and even Shepherds Bush was a bit of a way.

At the time, civil servants, postmen, bus drivers, bus conductors, people like that who had regular jobs, could get a house quite easily. Dad was a motor coach builder and it was more difficult for someone like him. He'd be out of work for weeks on end, sometimes even long enough to get relief tickets.

Dad used to worry and worry about getting a house so he would often go up to Spring Gardens, Whitehall, where the London County Council had their headquarters. Before he could be given a house, they had to know he would pay the rent. In those days you could be one week behind with the rent but if at anytime you were two weeks late, that was your lot and out you went.

Finally after five years they offered Dad a house in Roehampton. Up till then we had been paying ten bob a week for three rooms in Paddington and when my grandfather heard about the move he had fifty fits and nearly went berserk. He thought Dad was crazy. "How are you going to pay twelve and six a week, and half a crown in rates?" he asked.

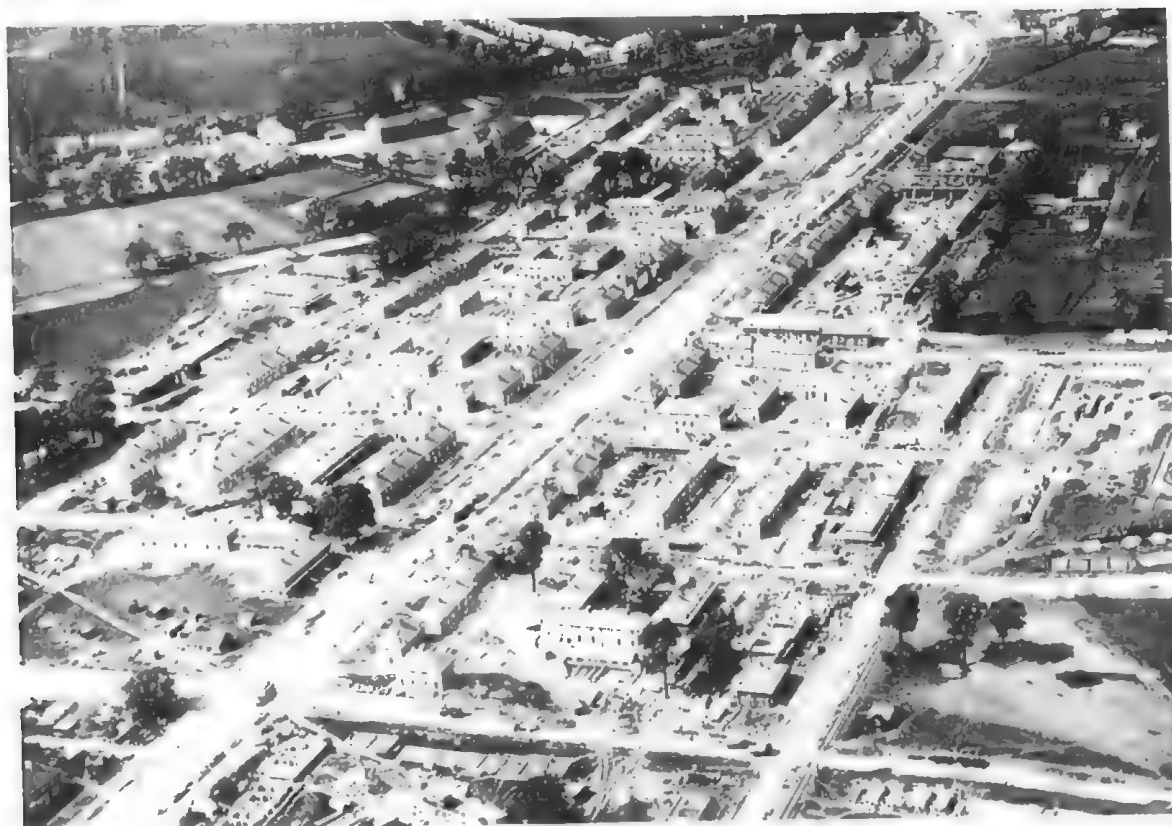
My mother was so glad to get away from Paddington. It can't have been easy for her living with her mother-in-law, who was always nagging her, and my grandfather and great grandfather. So when she got this house, with a bathroom and a back garden we could play in and our own front door, she thought she was in heaven.

Ivy Woollett (Roehampton)

I had been on the council list for five years and I was dead lucky to get a house. The council didn't want me to come because I had just moved into such a big room the kids could skate around in it, but my landlady didn't like children and if we wanted a bath we had to go down to the basement and walk through the sitting room of this other flat. I wanted to get out, I wanted a place of my own.

One day someone from the council came to see me. He said, "You're down for a house, but you don't need one." "Oh, but I do." I said. I think he then took pity on me because he said, "You've got two children? Um....". And he kept trying to hint at something but I couldn't think what he was trying to get at. He said, "You don't mind me mentioning this, but if I could say you were expecting another baby, then I could say, yes, the flat is not big enough." "Oh!" I said. I hadn't got the brains to think that one out. But that's how we got down here to Watling.

Elizabeth Knight (Watling)



Aerial view of St Helier, May 1930

PRIORITY CASES

In 1934, when I was twelve years old, my family had to leave our flat in Charlton because the property was going to be sold by the owners. As we had nowhere to go, my mother applied to the London County Council to see if they could help. The fact that we would soon be homeless and that I had a history of consistent ill health apparently gave us some kind of priority and my parents were told that they would be given a council house. We were absolutely delighted until we were notified, some time later, that we'd been allocated a house on a new estate being built in St Helier, near Carshalton, Surrey. My parents didn't want to leave London but were too scared to refuse this house in case they didn't get another one. So on the day we moved we were all full of fears about what life would be like in what we thought of as 'The Country.'

Dorothy Barton (St Helier)

When I found out I was pregnant with the second child, my husband went to the council and told them about our circumstances. They said they couldn't get us anything in the same area but if we were prepared to move into one of the newer towns, then they might be able to arrange something.

My husband badgered on at the council and within three months we went over to look at a house. This was very unusual because we'd always understood that it was well over a year or more before you were found somewhere.

Hetty Gates (St Helier)

CHECKING US OUT

I heard about the Roehampton Estate from the office boy at work. Up until then we never knew it existed. We made several enquiries to the London County Council and started getting the Wandsworth Borough News. The council recommended all the other estates but they never told us about the Dover House, Roehampton Estate. It was the best estate and that's why it was so difficult to get into.

The London County Council wanted to know what regiment I was in during the war and if I'd been wounded. You couldn't earn more than four pounds a week and the rent was one pound and two shillings which was much the same as what we were paying for our flat in Pimlico.

Mr Hibbert (Roehampton)

You definitely had to be married to qualify for a house. There were no one-parent families on the Castelnau estate. The estate was for young families.

You couldn't come over here just as a couple, you had to have at least one child, but most people had two children or more.

Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)

CHANGING OUR MIND

The London County Council allocated houses on the Watling Estate to people who lived in the deprived areas in London such as Islington and Camden Town. You will find that nearly everybody that moved there came from that neck of the woods. The East End mob went to the other end of the underground line to Becontree.

My mother's friends moved out of Islington and I think she missed them when they left. I remember she would say, "Oh, yes, I want to come too."

The rent for an estate house was about nine and sixpence and in Islington we paid eight shillings a week. That extra one and sixpence was a terrific lump in those days. People really found it very hard, you know. If they'd come from somewhere in Islington, paying as little as five shillings a week rent, nine shillings was almost double. All the men worked in London and you really had to think about the extra expense of the fares.

I wasn't a very healthy child and where we lived in Islington, we had a place called the 'Medical Mission', where you could get treatment, including your medicines, for sixpence. In those days doctors had to be paid for and there wasn't a clinic on the Watling Estate.

When my mother was offered a house, there was always an excuse not to leave. You see we lived so closely in London, but on an estate you were more spread out and I think people felt they were out in the wilds. Mother had been used to living in a block of flats, a very close community. Watling was way out and Mother was frightened by it.

So when she was offered a house, it horrified her. She was really very frightened of moving to Watling. I think she turned down those houses from the sheer fear of living in the country.

Violet Bunyan (Watling)

We were offered accommodation on council estates but we didn't much like where they were located. We saw blocks of flats where there was hardly a tree in sight. The council always wanted people to go to Dagenham, which was a huge estate. We didn't want to go that side of London at all. We had a friend move there from Battersea, and I went to visit her. She was very happy but I said, "Well, I like your house, but I couldn't live here."

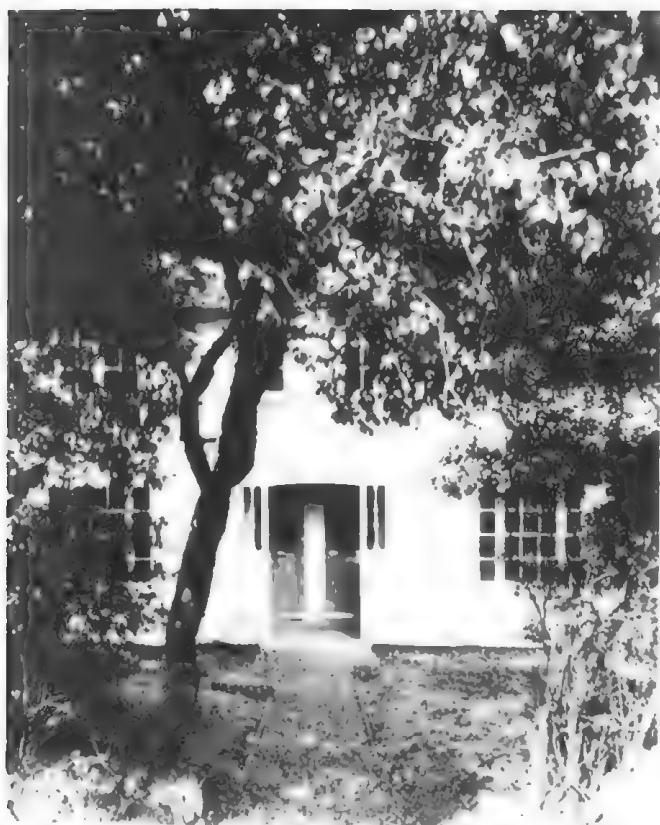
Mrs Hibbert (Roehampton)

A CORNER HOUSE

We were offered a house in Roehampton but my husband, who was a driver on the Piccadilly Line, wouldn't take it. He said he couldn't get to his work in Hammersmith from there, so we were shown a house on the Castelnau Estate, Barnes.

The house was in a street and had a shared path with the house next to it. As I was expecting a baby, I thought with two front doors so close to each other and me getting a pram in and out, it was going to cause trouble. My husband worked different duties and sometimes he came off duty in the early hours of the morning. He wanted his rest during the day and I had to think about the neighbour's children disturbing my husband. So I said to the council that I'd rather have the corner house because it had its own path and they said, "Well, it isn't taken, you can have it if you like." So I had to pay a shilling more in rent for the side entrance.

Mrs Martin (Castelnau)



*A double doorway involving shared approach and lobby.
Watling 1927*

A FIGHTER

People were very envious when we left. They would ask, "How can you get a place when we can't?" They probably hadn't gone the right way about it. We got our house because my mother was a fighter!

Vi (St Helier)

AN EXCHANGE

We came to the Watling estate by what was known as a 'mutual move.' My mother saw this notice in the sweet shop opposite where we were living. A family in Watling wanted to be near Euston Station, as the father worked on the railways. Mother went to look at their house and liked it. The railway worker looked at our flat which was two bedroomed and said, "Oh yes, just what I want." My father, who was a Londoner, was very annoyed about it. He thought going to Watling was like burying oneself in the country.

Amy Ewell (Watling)

WHERE'S THAT?

This letter came to say that we had got a house on the Downham Estate. We had never heard of it. After all those years of waiting we thought we were going to the Burnt Oak Estate, Edgware because it was near Paddington. We had no knowledge we'd ever be going to the border of Kent in South East London. We didn't know that area at all.

Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)

LOOKING IT OVER

In those days you didn't get a chance to view a house on the weekend, you had to view it on certain days. So I came over and they only showed me one house. We fixed the day of the removal and I remember we went to the estate office to get the key. As my husband didn't get any time off work he didn't see the house until he came straight from the office the evening of the move.

Mrs Hibbert (Roehampton)

My mother went to look at the house and when she came back she said it was lovely. We were all thrilled about it. I mean to live up there was like living in Buckingham Palace, compared to what we'd lived in.

Tina Belton (Roehampton)

Before we moved in, we came to the house quite a few times. It was semi-detached and had a small front garden and not a very big back garden. We would sit on the stairs and have our picnic and then wander round. I thought it was smashing really, out in the country. I remember my father said to me, "How would you like to live up here?" And I said, "Oh yes, I like it up here."

Jim Evans (Roehampton)

We lived in Lewisham and as far as I was concerned Lewisham Clock Tower was the hub of the world, I didn't know anywhere else. I was very young at the time, about seven years old, when my father took

me by the hand one Sunday morning and we went on an open top bus. I can just remember driving along on through Catford and gradually it became more countrified. We eventually arrived at the bottom of Bromley Hill and it was all very rural.

My father marched me across this wide open space that was all mud and pot holes, and we arrived at this house on the corner of Sandpit Road, so named because there was a sandpit nearby. I was told that it was going to be my new home. I remember the house struck me as being fresh and bright, but what stuck in my memory was the smell of the new cement because there was a concrete floor in the kitchen.

John Edwin Smith (Downham)

arrangements for a removal van to take our stuff from Whitechapel, which was a fair old run you see. Rudge Removals come up to the East End and all there was to move was the bedding, three beds, the china, pots and pans and other bits and pieces. It was very, very rough, because we were very, very poor. Anyway we put what we'd got in this old Dennis removal van and we all travelled with it to Becontree.

George Herbert (Becontree)

The van couldn't get right up to the houses as none of the roads were made up. No tarmac had been laid so we had to carry our furniture from around the corner.

Mrs Martin (Castelnau)



Willetts Removals, Downham

THE REMOVAL BUSINESS

In those days you daren't have the day off for moving because there might not have been a job for you when you went back into work the next day. So Hetty, my wife, packed the lorry and did the whole move by herself.

Alfred Gates (St Helier)

I was pregnant at the time. There wasn't a lot of furniture but we hired a lorry. After we'd seen everything was O.K. in the flat, we left the landlady the door keys because she insisted on having all of them back. We gave the lorry driver instructions of where the house was and I travelled there by train with my girl.

Hetty Gates (St Helier)

Mum and Dad had gone to look around the place in Becontree and there was everybody touting for removing you there. So of course we had to make

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Occasionally I would see a furniture van come along and it meant somebody was moving in. We were full of curiosity then and us kids would always dash over to the house and look at who was coming onto the estate.

Ken Wills (Castelnau)

People who had moved in perhaps a day or two before you sent round cups of tea. When the next person moved in, my mother would do the same.

Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)

WHAT'S THAT GREEN STUFF?

I was seven when we moved from Kings Cross to Watling. That was back in May 1937. I had never been to the country before and so I had no idea what it would be like. We were told the house was situated near a park and Father said there was plenty of grass. I would dream about parks with grass and roundabouts and swings. I'd seen grass in picture books but I didn't know what it really was so I had to imagine.

We moved to Watling in an old coal van. My father had to help the coalman do some deliveries to get the money for it. I remember it was pouring with rain the day we moved. Mum was in the front of the lorry, and the furniture, along with us kids and Dad, was in the back under a tarpaulin. The journey was about an hour and we was like wet rats when we arrived.



*Watling Estate. Road 3, blocks 22/25.
Building in progress, Nov. 1926*

As we were brought into the house we thought, "Is this all ours?" I remember saying to my father, "Where are all the other people?" We looked out of the window and my brother who was two years younger than me said, "What's that over there?" He couldn't make out what the green was or what the flowers in the garden were and I was glad he asked because I wasn't sure if the flowers were also called grass.

May Millbank (Watling)



St Helier Estate. Block 940, Sept. 1932



Watling Estate. Montrose Avenue looking north-east, 1926. Railway tracks and building materials

A SEA OF MUD

We had never seen the house before and had no idea what to expect. When we arrived we found a short row of red square boxes all exactly alike and brand new. There were only a few roads built and occupied, surrounded by a sea of mud and great trees lying around waiting to be sawn up and dragged away. Mother and I hated it on sight and she just burst into tears, it was so desolate. But when she found the house had three bedrooms, an indoor flush toilet and a bath in the kitchen, she was reconciled to it.

Dorothy Barton (St Heller)

I DON'T LIKE IT!

We weren't happy about moving in. Coming from a flat to this big house, it was all so strange, so much bigger and different. I think Mum thought, "God, I've got so much now to get on with." Although the council had done it up, it was in rather bad condition. She was so depressed with the house and after the furniture was moved in, Mum was so fed up with herself we just went for a walk.

Daphne Maynard (Castelnau)

I thought our house was all right but my husband didn't like it. To start with he said, "We'll never get our furniture in," and when we moved he refused to do anything. All he did was lay our carpet on the stairs. He didn't even put up the bed. He never spoke to me for nearly two months because he said, "Burying yourself in the country. Nobody's even been past the front door."

Elizabeth Knight (Watling)

IN THE DARK

I had never seen the house before and it was all so strange to us. Mum couldn't find where the gas was to turn the light on, so we sat in the dark until Dad arrived home from work.

Florence Essam (Becontree)

WONDERFUL!

When we arrived, the first thing my girl said was, "Mum can I run up and down the stairs as much as I like?" I said, "You can do exactly what you like, girl." She had a wonderful time up and down those bare stairs, with no carpet or anything. I remember I didn't feel no different about being in a new place except that, somehow or other, it was nice to be able to open the windows and let the fresh air in.

Hetty Gates (St Heller)

I can always remember the first night, it was about ten o'clock by the time we got to bed. We had three bedrooms and when I look at the rooms now they aren't that big, but when we moved in, we thought it was a castle, what with coming from a flat where us five boys had to share one room, you know. It was absolutely wonderful.

Stanley Breeze (Castelnau)

HOUSE AND GARDEN

THE PARLOUR

TUDOR WALTERS REPORT 1918

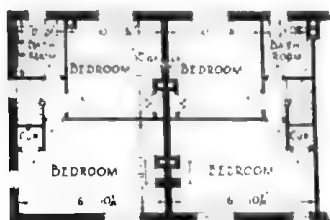
The desire for a parlour is remarkable both among the urban and rural workers. It is the parlour which the majority desire.

The parlour is needed to enable the older members of the family to hold social intercourse with their friends, without interruption from their children. It is required in case of sickness in the house and it is needed for the youth of the family, in order that they can meet their friends.

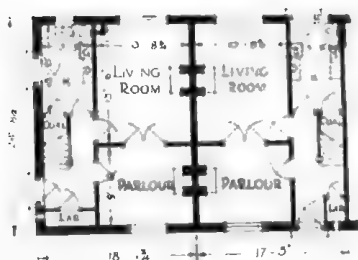
It is generally required for home lessons by the children of school age, or for similar serious study, serious reading or writing, on the part of any member of the family.

A parlour is also needed for the occasional visitors, whom it may not be convenient to interview in the living room. It will be seen that considerable importance is attached to the parlour and we consider that whenever possible a parlour should be provided.

105]
TYPE 54



FIRST FLOOR PLAN



GROUND FLOOR PLAN

REFERENCE
G. STAIRS
C. CLOSET
D. DRESSER
S. SINK
C.P. CUPBOARD
A. ALCOVE

SCALE OF FEET

THE PLAN
OF TWO
4 - ROOMED
PARLOUR
TYPE L.C.C.
COTTAGES.

4 ROOM COTTAGE

E. Wilson-Turner
ARCHITECT TO THE COUNCIL

Reproduced by permission of the London County Council

We were in what they called a five roomed house, which was three bedrooms upstairs, a toilet and

bathroom. We had a 'parlour type' and that was two rooms and folding doors. It was lovely, plenty of room, but once Mum and Dad got settled and there was furniture bought for what we called the parlour, of course that room was never used, except for Christmas or funerals.

Doris Pinion (Downham)

Some of the houses on the estate had two bedrooms and depending how many was in your family some of them had three. Some houses had two living rooms, a kitchen and a scullery, others had a bigger living room and a kitchen.

We all envied people who had what we called the parlour type house because they had an extra room at the front but it was said that all the houses stood in the same area of ground. The parlour type had a narrower kitchen, and their back room wasn't quite as big.

Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)

We had a very small front room which was turned into a bedroom in emergencies. It was too small to use for anything else and when we had company in we'd all have to go to the living room.

Leslie Charles Alder (Roehampton)

PARADISE

It was paradise, we could just look out of my bedroom onto the fields. You could see the flowers growing and there were cows and horses.

Richard (Downham)

NEW FURNISHINGS

I remember my mother going in for this rexine brown suite. It was in the front room and oh, it smelled lovely, you could smell the newness of it, but Mum never let us go in there a lot in case we mucked it up.

Mum had to buy new curtains because all the windows were different shapes then. As my grandfather was a skilled carpenter he made us these big curtain rings.

Florence Essam (Becontree)

BUCKINGHAM PALACE

We'd just got the beds, the four chairs and the table, that's all. So the place was empty. My eldest sister went up to Caledonian Market and bought my mum a big three piece suite, a massive thing, absolutely full of dust. Cor, every time you sat on it, you got a cloud of dust that filled up one room! Then she bought a secondhand sideboard and other bits and pieces, she helped my mum. Then my other sister gave my mum a few bob and we bought some lino floor covering, which was about half a crown a yard in them days. So of course we put it down all over and cor, we thought we were living in Buckingham Palace! We had three rooms upstairs, including the bathroom, two rooms downstairs which had two doors parting them. You could open them out and make one big room. They were big rooms too, and of course to fill them up was a problem, but at least we could fill one room downstairs.

George Herbert (Becontree)

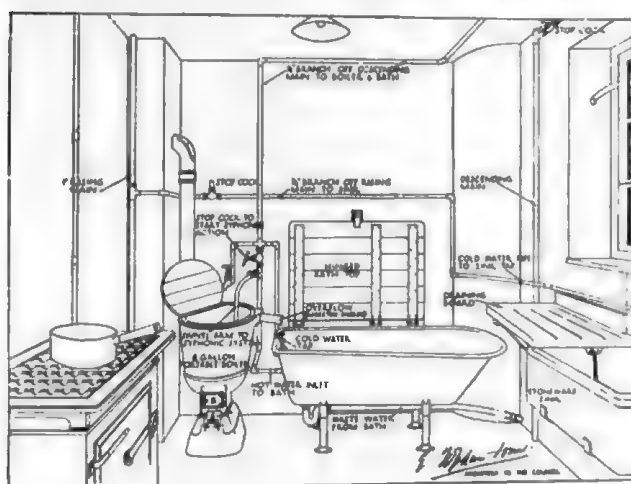
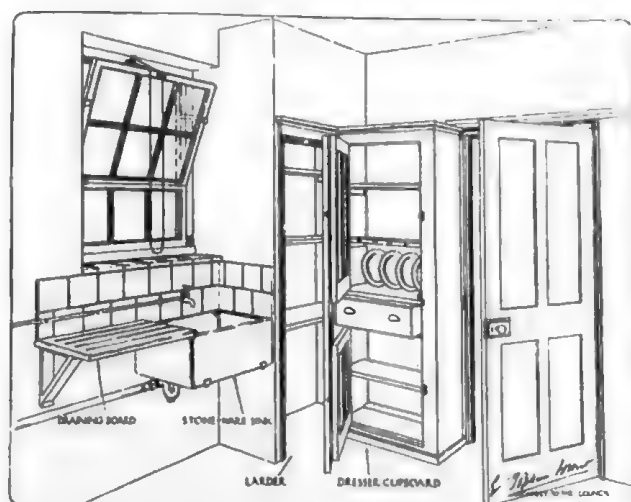
POSH!

When, in 1935, my sister and I started work, things became easier and my mother was able to ease off with the washing that she took in. Holdrons, in Peckham, used to be famous for selling things on the never-never and, in those days, you didn't buy things with cash, you all bought on the never-never.

My mother had aspirations which my dad didn't agree with and she went up to Holdrons and bought a walnut veneer bedroom suite which was like something out of a novel. She also bought, at the same time, a rexine suite with brown velour cushions, a sideboard with twist legs, a square table with four chairs and a rug for the floor. I thought we were posh but Dad was dead against it. I remember his reaction. He yelled and raved and screamed but it made no difference, we still got the furniture. It wasn't the repayments he was worried about, he was just quite content with what we'd

got. He would have spent any amount of money on the garden and allotment, but the home, oh no!

Rosina Evans (Downham)



Kitchen fittings of a typical LCC cottage

THE KITCHEN

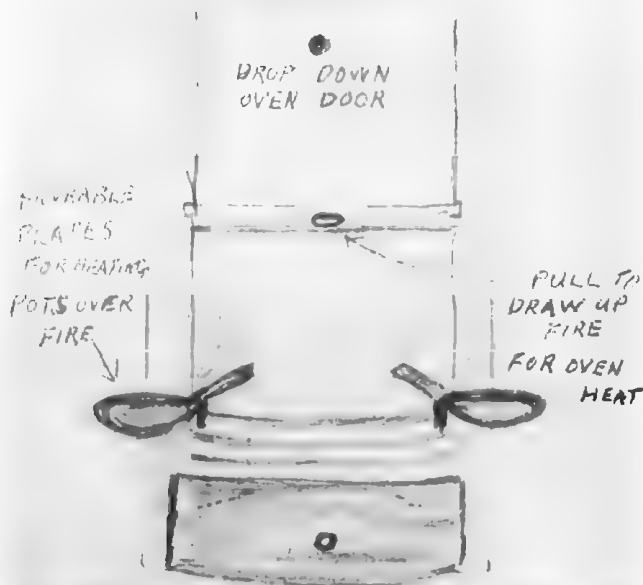
Inside our houses, each kitchen was complete with an airy larder, a coal fired copper for the washing and the heating of the water, and a large white earthenware sink with a cold water tap. All the kitchens were furnished with a black cast iron gas stove with brass taps, in fact there was quite a lot of brass around. The door handles, pump joints and taps were all kept gleaming and bright with 'Bluebell' at least once a week. The kitchen floor was concrete and the surrounds in the kitchen were cleaned with hearthstone twice a week.

Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)

The walls in the kitchen was just like bare brick that had been whitewashed. It was terrible. Kids were not allowed to touch the walls as the whitewash used to come off when you rubbed against it. Every wall had been distempered yellow and you weren't allowed to do anything as regards decorating. In those days the council kept a house empty until it had dried out and they didn't wallpaper because of the cost. There was also the worry about bugs and things like that.

Vera Andrews (Downham)

YEAR 14 30 YARLBOROUGH ROAD
FRONT ROOM FIRE PLACE



Mr Hibbert's oven, Roehampton Estate

TOTALLY USELESS!

The oven over the fireplace was a great big thing which went almost up the wall, it was so high. The idea was you lit the fire and you could cook in the oven above, but it never worked and no one used them. We used to put our wood in there to keep it dry, or put the washing in to air, otherwise they were an absolute sheer waste of time, totally useless!

Violet Bunyan (Watling)

The fireplace with the oven was in the living room. It was flat with a grill on top, so that you could stand the kettle on it. If you took the kettle off, you could let the top of the fire down, pull a blower and the heat would go up the back of the fire to light the oven above.

Gas was horribly expensive, so we were dependent on coal and that was expensive too. Dad was a motor coach builder and he used to bring spare wood back from his work. In the summer when the

weather got hot Mum let the fire go out. But when she cooked the Sunday dinner, she'd light the fire just long enough for the cooking to finish.

Ivy Woollett (Roehampton)

THE PANTRY

As a child I used to read about pantries in books. There would be a picture and it would say, "This is the pantry." I remember I wrote to my friend back in Poplar, "We've got a beautiful house with flowers in the garden, and inside there's a bathroom and a pantry." It sounded so posh!

Florence Essam (Becontree)

THE COAL HOLE

You couldn't cook in the oven because if you put a milk pud in, it used to get smoky. When the oven needed cleaning you had to lift it out and take it outdoors to sweep all the soot off. Oh, it was terrible really.

The other terrible thing in the house was the coal cellar which was under the stairs. I used to dread having the coals in. It was usually delivered in the summer because it was cheaper and we'd get in about half a ton. The coal men would come into the house, with their black sacks scraping the hall walls, and as they turned around, black marks were left behind. Even if you shut all the doors, the whole place wanted spring cleaning, there was dust in the air, everywhere. You'd also get that tarry smell, which came from the coalmen.

Couldn't the builders have put a door in the back yard? Then I wouldn't have had any of that dirt in the house. It was ridiculous.

Mrs Martin (Castelnau)

AN ELECTRIC COOKER

I know my mother was really frightened of the electric cooker and often received shocks from using her old pots and pans which were unsuitable for modern stoves but had been quite adequate for the old black range.

Irene Swanton (Page Estate, Eltham)

NOTE: Although this book is concerned with the LCC estates, we have decided to include a few memories of people who lived on a local council estate (the Page Estate, Eltham, then part of Woolwich Borough). We felt that their memories were of interest and their experiences were very much like those of the LCC tenants.

A.A.

GAS VERSUS ELECTRICITY

LCC TENANTS TO CHOOSE. 'EVENING NEWS' 1927

Downham is entirely a gas lit town and St Helier, the new housing estate is being lit electrically. A new phase was reached today in the completion of gas and electricity undertaking in London. It is true that tenants, with certain exceptions, have not been able to choose which form of heating or illumination they desire.

Formerly the cost to the council for installation of gas or electricity amounted to twenty pounds a house but the cost has been reduced till gas companies are now

prepared to equip the houses free of charge to the council.

Offers have been received to lay the necessary pipes free, on condition that the tenants have freedom of choice. The committee thinks the electricity supply authorities should be placed on the same footing. Both the gas and the electricity companies will be furnished with the names and addresses of incoming tenants and afforded equal opportunity to supply the tenants requirements.

DOCTORS AND HOSPITALS USE GAS FIRES



Doctors, hospitals, nursing homes and clinics—all use gas fires. Is not this striking testimony of the healthfulness of gas? The gas fire brings to your room, at will and at once, radiant cheerful heat—just like the heat of the sun. It changes the air in the room, continuously, without unpleasant draughts, and so keeps the atmosphere fresh. Because it creates no dirt, smoke or soot it makes for healthy homes, smokeless skies and sunny cities.

There are gas fires in designs, colours and finishes to harmonise with every style of decoration. The G.L. & C.C. is at the service of the public throughout its area of supply, for free information and advice on any use of gas. Write to Mr. G. A. Service at the address below.

GAS
for homes of to-day

THE GAS LIGHT AND COKE COMPANY, HORSEFERRY ROAD, S.W.1

LOCAL OFFICES AND SHOWROOMS:
69/71, GOODMAYES ROAD, GOODMAYES. Telephone No.: SEVEN KINGS 1125.
RIPPLE ROAD, BARKING. Telephone Nos.: URANUSWOOD 2001 and 2002

The Gas Company was touting for custom when we first moved in. The gas man would knock on your door and persuade you to have gas. You could get a cooker for almost nothing, and if you decided to have gas instead of electricity your cooker came almost free.

Alfred and Hetty Gates (St Helier)

The cookers in those days were supplied by the gas company. You paid fourpence a week for the hire of a gas stove. They were all black stoves and the tops were kept beautiful and clean by rubbing them down with steel wool.

Jim Evans (Roehampton)



Kitchen, Becontree Estate

It was the first time we had ever had gas mantles and you had to be ever so careful. If you dropped them, they just went to white powder. After about three years the London County Council said they were going to put electric in. You then had to put a penny in the slot and you got about two or three hours. Then the light would go out and you would have to find another penny.

Lillian Beardsmore (Roehampton)

A CLEAN BATH

I remember my first bath in our new house. When we had finished we forgot to take the plug out because we thought the water was to be re-used. When Father said, "The cloth and the stuff is up there to clean the bath up for the next one," we just couldn't believe that each of us could have fresh water. To shut the bathroom door behind me and have a bath in privacy was just heaven.

May Millbank (Watling)

A LOO OF OUR OWN

When we came here it was out of this world. A lavatory, cor, marvellous! Because in them days we never had toilet rolls or anything like that, it was all newspaper. Us kids used to cut the newspaper up into squares and thread it through with string and hang it in the lavatory.

George Herbert (Becontree)

I wanted to go to the loo and I said, "Is anybody in the loo?" Father said, "That loo is ours, just between us." I just couldn't believe it. Back in Kings Cross we shared a communal toilet and for weeks afterwards, I had to think, has it got engaged on the door?

May Millbank (Watling)



Mr Hibbert's drawing of his kitchen copper,
Roehampton Estate

ALLUM'S

GREAT 40 SALE

DESPITE the outstanding success of this unique Sale during its first week we still have a huge stock of EXCEPTIONAL BARGAINS to offer you. You will be amazed at the unquestioned value.

COME AND SEE OUR WINDOWS A SHOWROOMS FOR YOURSELF!

A Small Deposit Secures ANY ARTICLE.

£6/19/6

Goods Stored Free until required

GAIN EXTENSIVE SAVING 23/6

GAIN EXTENSIVE SAVING 39/6

GAIN EXTENSIVE SAVING 34/6

THE BEDROOM

You went upstairs and there were three lovely bedrooms. I was very lucky I didn't share a bedroom. I had the smallest bedroom and it was so light, it was lovely. My parents had the front room and my three brothers had the largest back room.

Mabel Wallis (Castelnau)

I'M NEARLY USED UP - AND STILL THE GREASE CLINGS!

LOOK AT ME! SIMPLY MOPPING UP GREASE! AND I'M STILL GOOD FOR DOZENS MORE JOBS!

MORE AND BETTER CLEANING FOR YOUR MONEY!

GLITTO kills grease!

The Glitto and see what light work every kind of kitchen cleaning becomes. Instead of you wasting yourself on wet hard rubbing, every particle of dirt dissolves powder ready for you. Glitto gives you extra and heavy cleaning for your money. It works faster on easily... leaves no streaks at all quickly... that the work is finished almost before it's begun! Soap "soaking" in "wet" ordinary cleansers. Glitto always for a clean, sparkling, prompt kitchen!

THE BATHROOM

We moved to Roehampton in 1926 and the General Strike was on at the time. The council had finished building our houses in Huntingfield Road, whereas the houses at the bottom of the estate had been done by private contractors. I got to know some pals down there and I went into their houses. They were far better than my parents' house. The houses built by Minters were far more superior, they had a boiler over the fireplace for the hot water and the baths were downstairs. Our boiler was in the kitchen and we had to pump the water upstairs.

Leslie Charles Alder (Roehampton)

A BATH IN THE KITCHEN

There was great excitement when we found that we had got our own bath and could actually get in and fill it up to our necks. My sister and I were quite young and we bathed together and had a lot of fun the first few times, but after that we weren't allowed to waste that much water.

The bath was in the kitchen and when not in use, it was covered by a wooden flap, which then could be used as a table. Under the kitchen window was a deep square sink, fitted with a cold water tap. As this was the only running water in the house, everybody used the sink all the time, from early in the morning, when Dad got up to wash and shave, till last thing at night, when we washed or bathed. In between all this coming and going, Mum had to do the washing up, the laundry, and everything else that needed doing. We all had to be very well organized otherwise there would have been chaos. Anyone going to lock themselves in the kitchen, to have a bath, always had to give prior warning, so that anyone else wanting to use the sink, could do so, while the bath water was getting hot.

I can still see the kitchen window neatly arranged with the household cleaning things on the left and Dad's shaving mug and bristle brush on the right, together with soap in a dish and a nail brush. A narrow roller towel hung behind the kitchen door for drying the hands. We each had our own towel for washing and bathing, and these were hung over the upright ends of the beds.

Dorothy Barton (St Helier)

THERAPEUTIC

I was skinny as a rake and I used to love doing the pump for the bath. It was a lovely exercise and very therapeutic. If for some reason the pump didn't work, which was pretty often, then the hot water had to be taken upstairs by bucket.

Doris Pinlon (Downham)

A COLD BATH!

We used to boil up the water for the bath from the gas boiler in the kitchen. As you pumped you had to keep an eye on the gas. We used to put a penny into the gas slot then and you got a good penny's worth. We could have all the baths that we wanted and we found, to our delight, that if our sisters stayed too long in the bath, we could pump cold water from the kitchen into their bath.

Alfred Gates (St Helier)



*St Helier. View of typical kitchen with bath.
Ascot added later. Photo taken 1966*

FRIDAY NIGHT IS BATH NIGHT

We were allowed one bath a week, on a Friday night, that was a regular occasion. The bath was upstairs and we would have to pump up the hot water from the coal fired copper in the kitchen. The water used to spurt into the bath through a hole between the two taps. Each pump would send up about two cup-fulls of water so by the time the bath was full enough, it had become cold. In the end my parents finished up by carting the water upstairs in a bucket.

John Edwin Smith (Downham)

IN THE GARDEN

BECONTREE COUNCIL ESTATE HANDBOOK 1933

Neglect of the garden spoils the appearance of any house.

It is of special importance that the front garden should be neat and tidy throughout the year.

A garden can be made to look attractive by the expenditure of a few shillings annually.

Strive to obtain a natural look rather than an artificial effect. Bordered edging and concrete paths do not give the restful effect of turf with neatly trimmed edges.



The open effect of grass covered corners. Becontree

GETTING STARTED

We lived on a corner at the end of a terrace. Our front garden was quite big and our back garden was a mere triangle, just enough room to put a few feet of washing line.

When we first moved in there was just a heap of clay in the garden. My father was a foreman bricklayer and I think he got one of the older bricklayers, who was a bit of a gardener, to come and mark it out. I remember him making a circular flower bed and ringing it with lumps of old stone and concrete that had been found among the building materials. I think my father took a few cuttings from the privet hedge and put them each side of the path leading to the front door so that we had a continuous privet hedge all round.

John Edwin Smith (Downham)

On moving into the new concrete, all electric, council house, we found the land behind was a heap of yellow clay, as in the process of digging the foundations and drains, this had been churned up and dumped on the surface, although the ground beneath was formerly fields.

My parents set about developing a garden, something they had never known but had longed for.

Mum was mainly in charge of the operations and it was remarkable what she achieved over the years.

There was a large area of ground, so firstly a crazy paving path was laid made from broken pieces of plaster from the walls of First World War hutments being demolished. Half way along, a rustic arch was erected, which later supported huge bunches of Dorothy Perkins roses in summer. In the right hand centre was a circular rose-bed with fragrant blooms of every colour.

Joyce Milan (Page Estate, Eltham)

COMPETITION TIME

Sunday morning was gardening morning. You'd see people all down the road, in the gardens first thing, digging away. That was their pleasure. Pop would be out there till it got dark and all of us used to give him a hand. I used to cut the grass and trim the hedges and he'd do most of the flowers. The back garden was nearly the same length as the front and oh, it would be lovely sitting out with deck chairs on the grass in the fresh air. It was something different, like going on holiday, it was real nice.



7 Oldbury Road, Watling. First prize LCC Garden Competition, July 1931



*Joyce Milan with Irene Swanton's sister
in her garden, Downham*

A garden competition was started up by the London County Council and each of their estates had a competition of their own. You didn't know when the judges were coming but it was sometime during the summer. Our estate was inspected and judged by the London Gardens Guild and a couple of weeks before the competition, two people from the Guild, with a superintendent and perhaps a surveyor from the council, would come round to look. Once you knew they were on the warpath, you were out there keeping your garden up to scratch and there was great competition amongst us.

Clem, a railway guard at 44 Barnes Avenue, used to take the prizes mostly. He had his garden laid out with concrete paths of diamonds, with crazy paving and all that sort of thing. He had a few bits of grass that didn't need mowing and these narrow flower beds, so he only had a small area to plant out. All he had to do was go down to the market and buy half a dozen potted plants, rather than bring them up from seeds.

As to prize giving, there was nothing like champagne. I think the first prize was ten pounds and a cup, and the other finalists got certificates. To show people who had got the prizes, copies of the certificates were put up in the estate office and as I worked for the council I had the job of sticking them up.

Stanley Breeze (Castelnau)

When my wife and I married, I stayed in the same house. I can't stand gardening but my wife took an interest in the garden and to the neighbours' surprise we won a London County Council second prize for the front garden, which was ten shillings. When the judges came to give the prize they said, "Are you new people here?" "No," I said, "I've lived here all my life." "Well, what's happened to your garden?" "My wife, she loves gardening," I said.

Jim Evans (Rochampton)



43 Gaskarth Road, Watling. Prize garden, July 1929

THE GARDENING CLUB

After I left school I worked on the estate as a plumber for the council and before the war started my supervisor, who liked gardening, said, "Do you think you and your Pop could set up a gardening centre on this estate?" Well, we had a meeting and my supervisor decided we needed a shed to trade from, because we weren't allowed to trade from the council yard on a Sunday morning. After a couple of weeks he managed to get hold of this big shed and we had it put next to the church hall in Stillingfleet Road. We then got a notice all round the estate that the gardening club had opened.

For the first couple of months I was put in charge of receiving the goods, which were delivered into the council yard. Naturally we used to buy in bulk and the big lorry came with the lime and pots and other things and I'd check it over. On Sunday at eight o'clock we'd take the goods to the shed, which took a bit of carrying. We'd weigh up the lime into seven pound bags, organise all the boxes of plants and get everything ready for when we opened, from ten o'clock to twelve o'clock. The things at the club would be about tuppence a pound cheaper than in the shops, which in those days was a lot. We wasn't allowed to make a profit and we didn't want to, we were just there to help the people.

Stanley Breeze (Castelnau)

Everyone was new to gardening and you learnt from scratch. A little gardening club started up just for the estate and you could buy plants and anything else you needed at cost price. If you had something to sell or exchange, you could put a little note up. I had an allotment to grow vegetables, and we paid a very small rent for it, but you got your money back on it. At the club there was a shop where people could exchange vegetables and lend each other things.

Violet Bunyan (Watling)

A BLAZE OF COLOUR

My mother was mad on flowers, she was a real garden lover. Her flower garden in front of the house was a joy to behold and I doubt if she ever bought a plant. Different neighbours gave her cuttings and roots and she grew a beautiful privet hedge by this method.

You were allowed to do anything you liked with your garden as long as you kept it nice. All the gardens on the estate were nicely tended and some were excellent. We had garden competitions but we didn't go in for any because it wasn't my mother's way of gardening.



Phyllis Rhoden hedge cutting in Launcelot Road, Downham

We used to buy penny packets of seeds and get our bean poles from a nursery off Burnt Ash Lane, Bromley. Mr Prior was the nursery man and it was really lovely going there and seeing all the plants growing. From our seeds we grew mignonettes and little tiny black violas and we had hundred of flowers. Mother would gather rocks from heaven knows where and she grew her Snow on the Mountain, London Pride and ice plants around them.

Our roses were the old fashioned kind, deep pink cabbage roses, with the most beautiful perfume. There were quite a few houses that were being knocked down around our way and we used to go to their gardens and bring an old rose tree home. We had large marguerites in June, and the tall single sunflowers were very attractive. One occasionally saw the big plate, eight foot sunflowers, but these were regarded as curiosities, with their habit of turning their faces to follow the sun. The daddy-long-legs made their home there and apparently preferred to live at the back of the blooms. My favourites were the hollyhocks which thrived under the plum tree and around our windows. They always spelled home to me.

The well-tended gardens were all part of the scene and in summer were an absolute blaze of colour. No one moaned about the grass cutting and those were the days of non-electric garden machinery. It was all part of the joy of having your own patch.

Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)



Becontree garden

Every inch of the garden was used, growing flowers of every kind. I cannot recall any flower my mother had not attempted to grow at sometime. She could take a cut flower, put it in the earth, and it would grow. Many delightful chrysanthemums were produced this way. I fear I never inherited the gift.

Beyond the gate, we grew vegetables of all kinds, potatoes, carrots, cabbage and Brussels sprouts. Even celery and cucumbers were given a try. Mum planted a small apple tree which produced delicious fruit, and recently I peeked over the nearby church wall to look at our garden and was pleased to see the same tree, now grown very large, in the same spot.

Also to add to our pleasure, we had a small aviary of singing canaries near the house.



Joyce Milan with her father digging in their garden, 1930s

Our garden was always a blaze of colour in the summer months, with neighbours often calling at the door requesting that their friends or relations could view, there not being much profusion of flora in Inner London areas in those times.

We never took a holiday, mainly due to lack of money, but even in later years after I had married, my mother considered she had everything in the garden and did not need holidays elsewhere. She always felt she had her own bit of country on that council estate.

Joyce Milan (Page Estate, Eltham)



Downham family in their garden

ESTATE MANAGEMENT & MAINTENANCE

RULES AND REGULATIONS

CONDITIONS OF TENANCY FOR THE CASTELNAU ESTATE 1930-33

- 1 The total weekly rent shall be paid in advance each Monday to the Superintendent at the Estate Office.
- 2 THE TENANT SHALL NOT:
 - (a) Assign this Agreement either in the whole or in the part.
 - (b) Underlet the premises or any part thereof.
 - (c) Use the premises or any part thereof as a shop or workshop, or for the carrying on or the storage of the implements of any trade or business.
 - (d) Expose in the premises or any part thereof any goods or materials for sale or hire.
 - (e) Drive nails or allow or permit nails to be driven into the walls of the premises.
 - (f) Allow or permit pictures to be hung otherwise than on picture rails, when provided by the Council or on picture hooks of a pattern supplied or approved by the Council.
- 3 THE TENANT SHALL NOT without the previous written permission of the Council:
 - (a) Affix to or exhibit on the premises any notice, nameplate or advertisement.
 - (b) Keep on the premises or any part thereof any pigs, rabbits, fowls or pigeons.
 - (c) Erect or permit to be erected any structure in the garden of the premises.
 - (d) Erect or permit to be erected any wireless aerial or make any attachment to the premises in connection therewith.
 - (e) Accommodate lodgers.
- 4 THE TENANT SHALL keep the front garden of the premises in a neat and cultivated condition, and shall give the Council's staff reasonable facilities for maintaining and cutting the hedge abutting on roads.
- 5 The tenant shall be entitled to use the back gardens of the premises as a drying ground for his own washing, but shall not otherwise expose to public view or hang out from the windows or on the balconies of the premises any washing or any unsightly objects.
- 6 The tenant shall in his turn, as determined from time to time by the Superintendent, keep any passage, staircase or yard that he shares with other tenants swept and clean. He shall also, in a like manner, light and extinguish any lamp used to light a staircase, passage or yard.
- 7 The tenant shall deposit refuse from his premises in the dustbin provided by the Council and shall in all other respects observe the arrangements made from time to time for the collection of refuse.
- 8 The tenant shall clean the windows of the premises at least once every week.
- 9 The tenant shall have all chimneys in use swept at least once every year.
- 10 The tenant shall immediately after any birth, case of infectious disease or death occurring in the premises, report the same to the Superintendent at the Estate Office.
- 11 The tenant shall on the occurrence of any case of infectious disease in the premises cause the person affected therewith to be removed at once to a proper hospital.
- 12 The tenant shall give the agents and workmen of the Council (and of the local authority if so required by the Council) all reasonable facilities for entering upon the premises at all reasonable hours in the daytime for the purpose of inspecting the state and repair thereof and of doing such repairs thereto as may be considered necessary and of seeing that the conditions of this Agreement are being observed.

- 13 The tenant shall repay to the Council the cost of any special cleaning necessitated on the determination of the tenancy by reason of having left the premises in a dirty condition.
- 14 The tenant shall repay to the Council the cost of repairing any damage done to the premises (other than that resulting from ordinary fair wear and tear), and of clearing stoppage in drains due to carelessness.
- 15 The tenant shall repay to the Council the cost of replacing windows broken in the premises during the tenancy.
- 16 The tenant shall sign an acknowledgement of the number of keys supplied to him at the commencement of the tenancy, and pay the sum of five shillings as representing the value of the said keys. He shall be entitled, on the determination of the tenancy, to a refund of the balance of the said sum of five shillings, remaining over after the Council have applied any part of the said sum in or towards the cost of replacing the keys lost or not handed over to the Council or in or towards rent not paid in or towards the cost of repairing damage done to the premises by the tenant or in or towards any other expenses payable by the tenant.

- 17 The tenancy may be determined by the Council at any time by seven days notice in writing.

On breach by the tenant of any of these conditions, the tenancy may be summarily determined by the Council at any time.

The tenancy may be determined by the tenant at any time by seven days' notice to expire on a Monday, signed by the tenant and given to the Superintendent at the Estate Office.

- 18 The local rates, house duty and water rate paid by the Council for the period current at the date of entry into occupation are equal to the weekly sum charged to cover payment for the same. In the event of the local rates and water rate being either increased or decreased the Council will give or cause to be given to the tenant seven days notice in writing of the said increase or decrease and of the consequent alteration in the amount of weekly rent payable by the tenant and of the date from which such alteration will take effect and the total weekly rent payable shall be increased or decreased accordingly.

THE INSPECTORS ARE COMING!

When we first moved to Downham we had inspectors every so often to come and see if you were keeping the place clean. The word would go round, the inspectors are coming!

When you moved you had loads of rules to keep. The windows had to be washed every fortnight and the front step cleaned once a week. No mats were to be shaken after ten o'clock. No cats, no dogs, no pets of any kind. Then indoors there used to have to be a fire guard for the children. You had to keep your children under control at all times, you couldn't let them run about and do as they liked. They couldn't go on the greens or climb trees or anything like that.

If you didn't abide by the rules in the rent book, you'd get a real severe letter from the council. They didn't give you many warnings and they'd take action against you. Same with the children. They'd send for you to go up to the council office if someone reported your children misbehaving or misusing the greens, anything like that.

Beatrice Kitchen (Downham)

No. F 3476

London County Council.

VALUATION, ESTATES AND HOUSING DEPARTMENT.

Received of Mr. W. Chapman a
deposit of FIVE shillings and — pence
in respect of the tenancy of No. 75 Headcorn Rd
Dated this 14th day of June 1937.
W. Clark
for Superintendent. }
Caretaker.

NOTE.—The deposit is held as a guarantee that the tenement will be handed over in a good and clean condition, and deductions will be made therefrom for any keys missing or any unsatisfactory condition of the tenement or fittings due to the tenant's carelessness or neglect.

The deposit will not be refunded except on production of this receipt.

One of the rules of the estate was to keep the front garden looking nice. The council caretaker would look at the front gardens and if yours was out of order, or well and truly overgrown, he would knock on your door and say, "You must get this front garden cleaned up and I'll come and see it in a week's time." You were given that week to get it tidy or you were in trouble.

The caretaker had his own estate house and he used to cycle round the estate twice a day, morning and afternoon. If the children were doing anything they shouldn't, they would run away as if he were a policeman coming.

Lillian Badger (Castelnau)

THE GREENS

Children weren't allowed to swing on the gates or play on the greens. You were allowed to go on the paths and that was it. There used to be a chap going round the streets, we called him the Green Man. He was very strict and would chase us off the greens. He used to say, "You've got back gardens to play in." He kept the estate in good order and it didn't get vandalized, as the children were frightened of him. As soon as we saw him on his bike, we used to run.

Florrie Abel and Gladys Hanson (Bellingham)

Children weren't allowed to play on the greens, lean on the hedges or kick footballs around and if they did, 'Happy', as we called him, who worked for the council, was the one to say, "Get off there!" The children respected him and they called him 'Happy' but he was a bit solemn really.

Mrs Hibbert (Roehampton)

On the corners of most roads was a little green which was surrounded by wooden stakes with a metal pole connecting them together to form a low fence. Everyone called them 'the greens' and they were regularly trimmed once a week. We weren't really supposed to play on them, but we did. I remember there was one man who used to go berserk when anybody used to go on the green. He had one leg and of course he was called 'Peg Leg', and he was a right miserable old bugger!

We used to play cricket on the green and it was very unfortunate but if the ball was going to go through anybody's window, it always went through one particular woman's window. Of course in the end she got so incensed that she used to keep the balls. The local policeman would come round and sort it out. We would probably end up with a clip round the ear, but he'd get the balls back for us. Later on we would find our pocket money had been docked to buy a new window.

Ken Wills (Castelnau)



Watling Avenue showing Virginia creeper over frontages

A PRETTY ESTATE

Watling was a lovely clean estate and very pretty. The council had planted all this five-fingered-Jack, that's Virginia Creeper, and every house was covered in it. It turned brilliant red in the autumn, the colour of a beetroot plant and it looked absolutely beautiful. The council used to come round twice a year and trim the leaves round the windows but of course they found it too much hard work and in the end it was mostly dug up. If you walk around the estate today you can still see a little of it left.

People from the council would come round and cut everybody's hedges and the lawns in the cul-de-sacs, not just the bits that showed on the main road. They'd encourage people to keep things nice. Keepers would go round and you never got children breaking things down, probably because they were a bit more frightened of authority.

Violet Bunyan (Watling)

NO PETS ALLOWED

I thought the house was smashing but the only thing that upset me a bit was that you couldn't have any pets up here. No pets whatsoever were allowed by the London County Council. Back in Regents Park where we used to live, we had a big black rabbit that was almost wild. It used to run round the garden and chase the cats, and he had to be left behind.

Jim Evans (Roehampton)

THE ESTATE OFFICE

I saw this advertisement by the London County Council's Valuation, Estates and Housing department in the News Chronicle Newspaper. It was for Estate Clerks, and said, "A knowledge of building methods would be an advantage." I applied for the form and I remember it had about four blank pages for you to write about your experience in building. As I didn't have very much at all, I just put the word 'slight' on the first page and on the subsequent pages I said, "See page one."

Of course I got the inevitable answer, "Thank you for your application but at the moment....etc." But twenty-four hours later it was followed by another letter which said would I please arrange to come for an interview.

The sub-committee of the Housing Committee interviewed me. They were rather helpful as I was a delegate to the London Trades Council and had got the secretary to stand as a referee. The other referee was my trade union organizer and as it was a Labour run council it went down fairly well.



*Downham Estate Office, Headcorn Road, 1927.
Note LCC classes sign*

A letter then came to say I had been appointed as an Estate Clerk on the Becontree Estate for the princely sum of two pounds and ten shillings a week. It was December 1937 and I was just twenty-two years old.

That first Monday, I had to report at half past nine in the morning to the Estate Office at 100 Ford Road. I got there early and was met by the Superintendent of the section who was a lovely gentleman and he made me most welcome. We went inside the office, at twenty past nine, with the office due to open at half past. There was another clerk there and the superintendent showed me what I had to do. He said, "There's the rent book and there's the squares with the dates against them. You put down the amount and you enter it on a sheet of paper, which is headed with the name of the road. You put the number of the house and the amount you've taken. There's five pounds worth of change over there, sort it out in the till here." Then he said, "Oh, I've got to open the office now." And that was the extent of my training.

Becontree was divided up into twenty-one sections with an estate office in each one of them. The rent offices were graded from 1 to 4, with 4 being the smallest. I worked in a Grade 1 which consisted of a Grade 1 Clerk, two estate clerks and a Superintendent who lived in a cottage adjacent to the office. Some Superintendents had accommodation, a flat over the office.

We would take 800 rents every week. At the end of the week we then did a balancing trick with the figures, put it down on a sheet of paper and sent it up to the central office at 882 Green Lane, Dagenham.

There was an iron grille between me and the customers and they would push their rent book and their cash underneath the grille. The grille was there so if anyone got irate about something, they couldn't jump at you over the counter. If there wasn't much of a queue, one or two people would have a chat with me. A very few were abusive but otherwise the people were reasonable and I think we were too.

In the afternoons we executed new lettings, that was when someone would come along and view a cottage. Most of the people took what was offered them. You issued them with a rent book, and there was a five shilling key deposit, which was refundable if they moved out providing five shillings worth of damage, for instance broken windows, had not taken place.

Another job we had to do was serve notice to quit. If people were a week in arrears with their rent, we would send a 'First Arrears Letter', which would be a gentle reminder. If it continued for another two

or three weeks, you would send a second letter of rather sterner stuff, "Look here, you've got to pull yourself together and get paid up, or else!" If there was no effort being made you would serve a notice to quit. This was merely a safeguard just in case it went on and on and on. If the rent didn't get paid they would end up in court.

As I recall there were a very few actual evictions during my couple of years before the war. Usually the family would skeddadle, leave without giving their notice. Possibly there had been a family dispute or he or she fancied the bottle too much or had got into debt on the horses, having used the rent in order to back the next winner that lost!

Eric Phillips (Becontree)

PAYING THE RENT

We moved to Dagenham from a two bedroomed flat in Bromley where the rent was four shillings and five pence a week. In Dagenham it was expensive, the rent was fifteen shillings and two pence. Well we wanted the house, we had to manage.

Amelia Cogley (Becontree)

Mr. Deadmore The Net Rent is 15/6 per week, and the balance payable represents the charge to cover payments for local rates, house duty and water. No. 13 HUNTINGFIELD ROAD.

Due Date.			Cash Received.		Initials of Receiver.	Due Date.			Cash Received.		Initials of Receiver.
Date.	Amount.	Date.	Amount.	Date.		Amount.					
1921.						1921.					
Mar. 21						Sept. 19					
28						26					
Apl. 4						Oct. 3					
11						10					
18						17					
25						24					
May 2						31					
9						Nov. 7					
16						14					
23						21					
30						28					
June 6						Dec. 5					
13						12					

N.B.—The rent is due on Monday between 9.30 a.m. and 1 p.m. for the week commencing that day.

Because there was no social security in those days the council had stipulations on our estate that one had to earn at least three pounds, ten shillings a week, so that you could afford the rent. As the houses were built for the working class, the maximum you could earn was five pounds. The rent my mother paid for a four roomed cottage was twelve shillings and sixpence. The rates, were half a crown, and it brought it up to fifteen shillings a week.

Leslie Charles Alder (Roehampton)

TOO WELL-OFF TO BE A COUNCIL TENANT

There was one friend of mine whose father was a bus driver. With his overtime and his basic wage he got just under five pounds a week. Well it came to the ears of the London County Council that this man ran a private dance band, so he got six months notice to move off the estate, which might have done him a lot of good because he bought his own house.

Leslie Charles Alder (Roehampton)

HARD TIMES

When they had a big strike over at Fords my husband was out of work for three years. All we got was three shillings labour money, a loaf of bread and blue tickets. I can see them tickets now. I used to hate going into the shop with them. But we stuck it through.

We paid our rent weekly and the same rent collector used to come round and knock at the door. A lot of people, if they didn't have the money, wouldn't open the door. There must have been quite a lot of people on the estate who couldn't afford the rent and I imagine the pawn shop was pretty busy. I had to pawn my husband's boots and his chain. I done that because I'd lost a baby and wanted her buried and I never could get that chain out again.

Betty Mapstone (Becontree)

The total rent we paid was fifteen and six. Mind you, that was for a three bedroomed house. I had to pay five shillings for the keys and I got a key to every door including the coal cellar and the broom cupboard. I've still got my keys and I don't know what the council would say if I took them in now!

Vi (St Heller)

THE THREAT OF EVICTION

The rent always came first then and my mother always knew what time the rent collector was

coming and it was jam and toast for a couple of days after the rent had been paid. My parents used to say, "Right, we have got X amount for food and if there is any money spare, one of you can have a pair of shoes." But the rent always came first.

If you didn't pay the rent you were given a month to move out, irrespective of whether you'd got one or ten children, you was out! I think if a family had to leave, they'd be put in a halfway house. There used to be one up at the Edgware General Hospital.

It looked like a block of flats and they had communal eating there. People would stay there until such time as they had pulled their socks up. But you never saw the same people back on the estate again.

May Millbank (Watling)

As a kiddie I remember wanting to know why some people had their furniture put outside. I would come home from school and sometimes see people being put out of their house by the council and I would feel sad. If it was raining, a kind neighbour might come out with a bit of tarpaulin to cover the belongings. I'd ask my mother about it and she'd say, "Those people couldn't pay their rent, so the council have put them out." And I suppose those that couldn't afford the rent went to a relative.

Florence Essam (Becontree)

REPAIRS, PAINTING AND DECORATING

Behind our office was a yard which had a carpenter, a plumber, a handyman and a few decorators. People would come in reporting repairs to us and after we had balanced up in the afternoon, we would issue chits for the workmen. Usually there was quite a lapse between asking for a job to be done and it being executed because demand exceeded the human resources to meet it.

Another job we had was to show people the wallpaper book which had about half a dozen patterns in it. If a house was due for decoration they could choose which wallpaper they wanted. The Grade 1 clerk was then responsible for issuing the instructions to the decorators and he would make out a schedule.

I was on probation for the first year and after that it was the beginning of my forty odd years with the London County Council and the Greater London Council.

Eric Phillips (Estate Clerk, Becontree)



Repainting on Downham

I left school at fourteen and got a job on the council. I had no intention of working for them but the superintendent of our estate said to my Father, "How would your son like to come and work on the council? He can learn all the trades, and it will be alright for him later on."

I wasn't over keen but the estate office was next door to where I lived and the job was worth fifteen shillings a week and I thought, "Fifteen bob, that sounds nice. Yes that sounds alright." So I gave it a try.

Joe Thompson was the estate handyman and I went out with him.

Perhaps we'd mend a few waterways but as time went on we had to have a plumber for the big plumbing jobs. Anyway this fella, Mr Green, came along and from then on I was the plumber's mate. Because he was on call all day he managed to get a house on the estate.

As council employees we didn't just work on the estate but also went to White City, Old Oak Common, Tooting and Hamble estates. We also looked after the fire stations which came under the council.

Naturally as the estate established itself, more men came to work in our office. Every estate had their permanent staff. You had your fitter, bricklayer, plasterer, plumber and they all had their mates except for the carpenters.

It really wasn't bad working, and I liked mucking around. I remember many a time I used to listen to the wireless, and when the time signal went at eight o'clock I'd jump out of bed and dash to work. The first thing we'd do was to have a cup of tea. Then you'd have your jobs, which might be a tank overflowing, the usual thing. We'd go round and repair that. Then perhaps, come dinner time, the bricklayer or plasterer had a special job, so they'd say, "Oh, I shall want a mate this afternoon," and it would be, "Oh, go and see about it Stan." So that afternoon I'd be the plasterer. Then the following day maybe a floor needed to be taken up and someone needed a carpenter, so I'd give a hand.

If there were any complaints, the superintendent used to go round and, if he couldn't get any satisfaction, he would fetch the surveyor down. The surveyors would come round and they used to poke their nose in on us. There was this one little fella, I will call him Mr X, anyway he was one of those, you know, just out of college. I don't suppose he was more than twenty-one but he'd find fault with everything.

I remember one day I was over at a house, doing some repairs and there was a decorator working there. The property we were working on was damp so Mr X comes along, pokes his head through a window and says to the decorator. "Do you think it would make a difference if you made your paste with self-raising flour instead of ordinary flour?" And that was Mr X!

In those days the houses were papered every five years. The distemperers and paperhangers would come in and I might go and give them a hand because I wanted to know how it was done. The insides of the houses were painted in yellow ochre and the bedrooms done up in distemper.

CLEAN, BRIGHT HOMES MEAN HEALTHY HOMES!

ONE sure step towards good health is clean "sunshiny" surroundings. Those rooms which are beginning to seem dismal can very quickly be made so bright and clean. Just buy a packet of SHERWOOD'S AMELENE DISTEMPER! It will only cost you 1/9 for a 3½lb. packet and you cannot help making a perfect job if you follow the simple directions.



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wall-paper. Try it—and be happy and healthy!

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Distemper was a mixture of whitewash and size. The whitewash used to come in lumps of chalk. It was put into a bucket, water was poured on to it and it was then left for a day. Concentrated size was then mixed up with hot water and poured into the whitewash and this would make it stick onto the wall. The stock colour, a yellow ochre powder was then added to the mixture and that was the only thing the council had on the inside walls. I remember the yellow ochre used to come in 28lb bags and, many a time, you'd go to pick up the bag, and it would split everywhere. The ceilings were painted white, and the decorator used to put a little bit of blue in with the ordinary white, as it made it look nice.

The council also had their own painting gang of about twenty to twenty-five painters, and they used to go from estate to estate. Practically all the external paint work was white except for the front and back doors which were done in Brunswick green. The decorators used to put varnish over the paint which gave it a lovely beautiful finish and when the front door was done over it used to look very nice.

Working for the council was a good job as I got to know all the trades, saw all the houses and I knew practically everyone on the estate. I worked at Castelnau for a couple of years but then the council wanted someone on the Roehampton Estate and I was transferred over there. The thing that got me down about that place was the hills.

Stanley Breeze (Estate Worker, Castelnau)

DECORATING – THE TENANTS' VIEW

About every five years the council came to decorate the inside of your house from top to bottom. There was a choice of two colours, buttercup yellow and pale green, and the paint was always a sort of beige, pastry colour.

The decorators would be there about a week and you were expected to be prepared for them. They would say, "We want the top front bedroom on Monday," and you were expected to have that room cleared right out. They did the stairs, the kitchen, the bathroom and so on and we weren't allowed to have any wallpaper then. I don't know why. The front and back door was always painted green and it wasn't until after the war they started doing the doors different colours.

Lillian Badger (Castelnau)

When the council did the decorating, you did get a choice of wallpapers. They had a book and you chose whichever pattern they had. But if you didn't like any of their patterns and wanted to go out and buy your own paper you could, the council still put it up for you. Most people waited for the council decorators because they really couldn't afford to pay out for paper and paint. In those days people had just about enough money to carry on without the extras, you know. Eventually things changed and everyone started decorating to their own taste.

I remember there was an argument between a friend of my mother and the decorators. She had paid a lot of money for a pink, silk-stripe effect, regency wallpaper, it was rather nice. I remember she was in a real state about it, saying that the decorators hadn't put it on straight.

Phyllis Rhoden (Downham)

SETTLING IN

WE LIVE IN THE COUNTRY

When we came to Dagenham we had fields and plenty of fresh air. Most of the fields round the yard were pea fields, cabbage fields and all that. When the word got round that it was being bought up by the council for building, we were allowed to go and take what was there. I'd get the pram out and load it up with cabbages. My mum would say, "Go and fetch us some rhubarb or peas."

There was an orchard on the other side of the railway and I can remember getting the pears. Me and Emmy, my sister, would listen for the train, "No trains coming." We'd cross over and climb up, get those pears and take them home.

There was a little stream near us and we used to dam it up with mud and bricks, anything we could find. It got deeper on one side so that we could paddle. It was lovely then. We used to get some sausages and potatoes off my mum and we went over to where the trees were. Emmy and I used to build a little fire, put our potatoes in and cook the sausages on a fork. We used to smoke the sausages dirty but we enjoyed them.

Florence Essam (Becontree)



*Dagenham Road, Becontree.
Site of 'Farnham Tavern', 1930s*

DOWN ON THE FARM

We moved to a house opposite a farm and the farmyard went straight across the road, as a matter

of fact you could just step over a ditch and be in the cabbages. Compared to the closeness of the East End, it was country you know, the spaciousness of Downham, it was absolutely beautiful.

Ron Chattington (Downham)



Ivy Woollett's mother and father, Roehampton

SHOWING OFF

When I was about twelve, another girl and I rode our bicycles all the way back to our friends in Westminster, just to show off that we lived in the country. We tried to put on country accents and pretended that we lived near a farm and had to go to school across a railway line. Mind you, we didn't tell them that the school was only across the building line. And do you know our friends were open-mouthed listening to us. Looking back on it, it was so silly but you know kids.

VI (St Heller)